

ONLY A WOMAN

A HEROINE OF
THE REFORMATION

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ORME'S SCHOOLDAYS," etc., etc.

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CHAPTER I

A SEVERE BEATING

THUD! thud! fell the blows, not one but many, on the bare skin of a slender boy; they fell, too, with even more cruel force on the heart of a little girl, hiding behind the corner of the next house in Mansfeld, Thuringia, towards the end of the fifteenth century.

"Oh, don't! don't!" she implored, in low tones of anguish. "Don't hurt him so!"

But no one heard or heeded the child, and the woman who was beating the boy, went on until the blood broke through the skin, when she stopped as suddenly as she had begun.

"That will teach you," she said, "to be honest in future, and not take even a nut from the store which is not yours! Begone from my sight! And don't come near me until you can express your regret for what has occurred——" She stopped short, for the lad had fled from her presence like an arrow from the bow.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child? No, I won't!" said Margaret Luther, straightening her back and smoothing her dress with work-worn hands, while a faint smile lighted up her stern features for a moment.

"What has the lad been doing?" asked a sturdy, fine-looking man, in the dress of a poor working man, entering from an inner chamber.

"He took a hazel-nut from my store," the woman replied, with indignation.

"Only a nut?" The man frowned a little as he spoke.

"Yes, Hans," returned his wife. "A nut to-day, and had I not beaten him, it might have been a loaf to-morrow."

The man shook his head.

"Maybe you are right," he said, "but I don't think our Martin will ever do anything very bad. He has more sense. He has a head upon his shoulders and—mark my words—he will be a clever man one of these days. I'll make him a scholar, and the world will hear of him."

Hans spoke with enthusiasm, and his eyes shone.

But the woman sighed.

"What profit will it be, Hans," said she, "if the world hears of him? I would rather have him save his soul, and——"

"Silence!" thundered Hans Luther. "Don't you go and want him to be a monk! I won't hear of it! I tell you I won't let him be a monk! I won't hear of it!" he stormed. "I hate monkish ways! My Martin is cut out for something better! He shall be a *man* and a *scholar*, not a *monk*!" The last words were uttered very contemptuously.

His wife sighed again, but made no attempt to pursue the matter. She turned away to her work, and presently her husband went off to his forge, where he toiled for a scanty pittance.

In the meantime the boy Martin had run off to the forest not far away, where he flung himself down on the soft sward and lay sobbing his heart out.

He thought he was alone, but near him, standing behind a tree, was his little neighbour Gretchen, her small, thin hands tightly clasped together and tears streaming down her face. She knew better than to disturb the boy just then. He would have resented her presence and her sympathy, had he known of it. But she would not go away and leave him alone in his sorrow; moreover, she was praying for him—not to God, but to Mary the mother of Jesus, beseeching that she would entreat her Son to have mercy on him.

Presently through a pathway in the forest, a big boy of about fourteen came striding along, whistling a merry tune. His face was round and good-humoured in expression, and he laughed, but not in an ill-natured manner, as he saw the *tableau* under the trees.

Martin looked up shamefacedly, and his red face became even redder as he recognised a friend.

"Crying! Tut! tut!" said the elder boy. "And Gretchen, too! Come here, child, what are you doing there?"

Martin frowned on the little girl as she came forward.

"You have followed me!" he said. "How dare you?"

Gretchen began to whimper.

"I was so sorry! It—it was *wicked* of your mother to beat you so! John," she appealed to the elder boy, "Martin's mother beat him till the blood came!"

John bared his arm.

"Look!" he said. "I've scratched myself with a bramble in the forest and it bled a bit, but that doesn't hurt much."

"I didn't say it did hurt!" Martin cried, angrily. "Gretchen, it's wrong of you to blame my mother! She's a good woman—father says that there isn't a woman like her in Mansfeld!"

Gretchen's tears came again. It was too bad of him to turn the tables on her. Yet she admired the way in which he stuck up for his mother.

"Poor little Gretchen!" said her brother, taking her part. "She meant no harm, Martin. She has such a tender heart. When my father beats me she always cries. Don't you, Gretchen?"

"Yes." She sidled up to him, taking one of his large hands in both hers.

"Let's sit down," John said, leading the way to a fallen tree lying by the path.

Martin looked considerably happier as he sat down near his friend John, who was always good to him and,

when he was younger, used to carry him on his back to the school on the top of the hill.

Gretchen sat on John's other side, smiling across him at Martin.

"I've been talking to a man who has come over from Bohemia to work in our mines," John said presently, "and he has been telling me strange things about John Huss, the man who was burnt at the stake—more than a hundred years since."

"Mother says he was a bad man," Martin said, "and he got what he deserved."

"I don't believe it," John returned. "I've been told that before, and I used to think so—but now I've learned differently. Listen——" he paused to look round and see if they were alone, and then continued.

"Huss taught what the priests called heresy. A man named Wycliffe, in England, had been preaching the same sort of thing. So when John Huss began, His Holiness the Pope said he was not to preach any more. But Huss disobeyed, for he believed it was right for him to teach people differently from what priests do—and they killed him for it. They dressed him up in his priest's dress, and then took it off piece by piece as they cursed him. And they cried, 'Now we deliver your soul to hell!' But he said, 'I give my soul to God and my Saviour, Jesus Christ'——"

Martin interrupted.

"I say! Wasn't that blasphemy on his part?"

"No, I think not," John answered. "The man who told me about it thought it was a beautiful answer——"

"Oh, go on, please!" Gretchen begged. "What did they do when he said that?"

She fixed her big eyes on John's face as she spoke, and clasped her hands very tightly.

"They killed him," answered the boy, sadly. "They took him into a meadow, tied him to a stake, heaped wood around him, and set fire to the pile——"

"And what did he do?" demanded Martin, in excited tones.

"He prayed to God. Think! He asked God to forgive his enemies. Then he was burnt up. There was nothing left but ashes."

"Nothing left but ashes!" repeated Martin, dismally.

"Stay! There was something," John went on. "The man said—the man from Bohemia said that some of his spirit and the memory of what he had done remained. Another man, called Jerome, followed his example, and was also burnt to death; and still to this day there are men hidden away in the country who think as they did."

"It's queer," said Martin, shaking his head, much as his parents did when pondering over what they did not like. "I'd like to know all about it—and what they taught, and why the priests and His Holiness the Pope were so mad with them for teaching it."

"I think I'll find out when I'm a man," said John.

"Oh, don't! don't!" cried little Gretchen. "You mustn't, either of you!"

"Why not?"

"'Cause they would burn you up—they would burn you up," she repeated, "if you learnt about those things! Oh don't learn about them! Don't!"

"They would not touch us unless we were to teach them, Gretchen," Martin said.

"But you'd teach them—you'd teach them if you thought they were right!" she cried. "I know you would!"

The boys did not deny it.

CHAPTER II

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE

CHANGES came with the years that followed. Gretchen's brother, John, left home to go to the free school at Eisenach, and thither in due course, after he had been a year at Magdeburg, young Martin Luther followed—for the latter's father, delighted with the progress he had already made with his studies, was determined that he should become a scholar, and, if possible, a lawyer.

Martin's four sisters, Barbara, Dorothea, Catherine, and Marie, and his little neighbour Gretchen, were sorry when the two boys went away. They had other brothers, but those two were so gentle and so clever and interesting that they were great favourites.

Gretchen was constantly thinking of Martin's wistful brown eyes, and wondering how he got on in the distant town. She knew John would be good to him, and therefore when he left the school at Magdeburg to join John at Eisenach, she was a little comforted.

The poor boys, she knew, had to sing from door to door in the streets of the town for food to support them while they were studying, as their parents were unable to give them enough money for their board; and sometimes, when she was eating, she found herself wishing that she could give some of her own food to them.

Gretchen's mother observed, in those days, that her little daughter looked pale and sad.

"The child is fretting after her brother," she said. "I will send her to my sister who lives at Erfurt. There she will have change of air and scene, together with plenty of young companions—for she will live with seven cousins, and no doubt they will be merry."

Gretchen sobbed a little as she packed up her clothes, but she dared not remonstrate with her mother. Only to Martin's sisters she said, when bidding them good-bye:—

"You will send me word how Martin gets on when you have news about him, won't you? I shall want to hear so much."

"I will write and tell you everything," answered Barbara, the eldest. "Cheer up, Gretchen. You may be in for a good time at Erfurt. I wish I was going in your place, for we are so poor and there are so many of us at home."

"You will give my love to Martin when you write," said Gretchen, kissing them. "You know he is my old playfellow."

Then she went to Erfurt, travelling with some friends who were going there.

It was a long journey and seemed to her interminable. Sad at heart was she, and feeling as if the end of all things had come. She feared she might never see her friend Martin again, and little she knew of what was to happen at Erfurt before many years were over.

To begin with, she found much work awaiting her in her aunt's house. Mrs. Hutten had written:—

"I send you my Gretchen to be your assistant as long as you will be pleased to have her. She is a good girl, and can put her hand to anything."

Mrs. Stiefel, Gretchen's aunt, understood this to mean that she was at liberty to use her niece as much as possible. She therefore set her to nurse the children, cook the meals, and make herself generally useful about the house.

The girl was willing and obedient, but not very strong; and there were times when the hard work was irksome to her in the extreme. Her limbs ached so much when she went to bed, and she was so tired that often she could not sleep. To make matters worse, some of her cousins were unkind and put upon her. But Gretchen did not resent this. Meekly and with the utmost good nature she strove to do her best, and at least succeeded in gaining her aunt's approval.

Mrs. Stiefel wrote to her sister that Gretchen was

indispensable in the house, and offered to adopt her.

Much to Gretchen's chagrin her mother wrote accepting this offer, "as she had several other children."

Gretchen shed bitter tears when she found herself thus given over to the oppressor. Had she been older and more capable, she would have left her aunt's house and found herself a situation as maid-servant in another; as it was, she thought it her duty to remain and slave, without wages, in Mrs. Stiefel's house.

"I shall send away my hired help," said Gretchen's aunt, "now that I have received my sister's letter, and Gretchen must do the work. She is a lazy little thing naturally, but I mean to sharpen her wits and keep her constantly employed. It will be cheaper for me to have her than a maid, for there will be no wages to pay, and she can wear my daughters' old clothes. It won't matter how she dresses, for I shall keep her in the background."

"Poor little woman!" said Jonas Stiefel, in response to this speech of his wife. "There's something nice about the child. Don't worry her to death, wife!"

"You mind your own business!" retorted Mrs. Stiefel. "And don't preach to me!"

Gretchen's cousins, Sarah and Leah, looked down upon her, and made her clean their shoes and wear their old petticoats. But little Hannah, the younger girl, loved Gretchen and followed her about everywhere, begging for stories about her old home and the forest, with its birds and animals. The elder sisters were cross with little Hannah for this, and often struck her—but, nothing daunted, the child clung to her new friend.

There were three boys in the house: the eldest, Luke, was a quiet, well-meaning youth, who secretly admired Gretchen not a little. But Thomas and David, his younger brothers, delighted to tease and annoy her. That was at the first, before Gretchen had won them over by her goodness and devotion.

It was no wonder that the poor little maid felt at times heart-broken, as she thought of her old home which had discarded her, of her beloved brother John, who was far away, and of Martin, her boy friend, whom she might never see again.

Martin's sisters did not write; they seemed to have forgotten her. Gretchen's idea of God was vague and very terrible. She had heard of His justice, and had been told of His wrath ever since she could remember; but no one had ever said in her presence that He was Love, and that He loved the children of men. She did not think she was His child. No; she had been told that she was a child of wrath, full of sin from the beginning, and the thought weighed heavily upon her.

"It seems I have been born all wrong," she thought, miserably, "and that it will take all the hard work of my whole life to try to get right again, and even then I can't be quite sure. I must try to save up money for the priests to say masses for my soul when I die, to make God have a little pity upon me."

How could she get money, who never had a chance of handling a coin? And how could she save it even if it were hers, when she had no single place where she could put any private possessions away from the mischievous hands of her cousins?

"I have no chance!" she said to herself. "No chance of escaping from the wrath to come!" And her tears fell down over her work, and her thoughts of God were hard and bitter.

With such sad thoughts in her mind, and such hard work to do morning, noon, and night, with no thanks or kind words to lighten the toil, it was no wonder that Gretchen fell ill, and, at last, was unable to leave her bed.

"She is shamming!" said her aunt, and she struck the girl in her anger.

Gretchen fell back in a swoon, and for a few awful moments Mrs. Stiefel thought that she had killed her.

In fearful alarm she seized some cold water, and

flung it over the girl's face and head. Gretchen came round, but she was raving in delirium and calling upon her brother John and Martin Luther to defend her from the wolves in the forest.

"Come! Come quickly," she cried, "or they will kill me! Oh! Oh! They will kill me, and I shall go to hell! For I haven't any money! I haven't any money to pay for prayers and masses for my soul! Oh, Mary, dear Lady in Heaven, take pity! Have pity on me!"

Jonas Stiefel himself went for a doctor, and the medical man came and proposed some simple remedies. "But you had better send for a priest," he said. "Her trouble is more of the mind and soul than of the body."

The doctor bled the poor maid, as the fashion was in those days, till she came to herself, and, opening her eyes, begged that they would leave her alone. Presently they did so, and she lay in a half-stupor from which she was aroused by the entrance of little Hannah.

"Dear Gretchen," said the child, "I've brought something to make you better. Look here what I've got!" She held out a bulky letter.

"For me?" asked Gretchen, faintly, raising her heavy eyes.

"Yes, for you. A friend of father's from Eisenach has brought it," answered the child. "It's for Gretchen Hutten from Master John Hutten."

"Oh!" Gretchen cried out with joy, stretching forth her eager hand for the letter which Hannah had brought.

CHAPTER III

THE PRECIOUS LETTER

GRETCHEN kept that letter of her brother John's all her life. It was the most precious of all her possessions, and she carried it about in her bosom long after she knew every word contained in it by heart.

The letter, more than anything else, helped on her recovery. Its contents were as follows :—

" MY DEAR LITTLE GRETCHEN,—They tell me you have left the dear old home-nest and our forest, and have gone out into the world to make new friends for yourself. Well, home will have one less attraction for me ; and as you are at Erfurt I shall hope to see you again before so very long. Both Martin Luther, who as you know is here, and myself mean to proceed in due course to Erfurt University, there to complete our studies and measure ourselves with other young men of learning. So you must look out for us, one day—two poor students travelling into Erfurt on foot, with their kits on their shoulders and their dress dusty and worn with their long tramp.

" Martin says it will be fine to have little Gretchen to greet us when we come. But I think, perhaps, little Gretchen will have become big Gretchen by then.

" Martin and I are only poor scholars, you know. When we first came here we had to go out singing in the streets for the food to maintain us while pursuing our studies. This led to great good fortune for our friend Martin. You know he has a very sweet, melodious voice, and one day when he had been singing, a good lady, Frau Ursula Cotta, took him into her house and gave him food, and bade him come again and again, and eventually she offered him a home in her house. So now he lives there, and will do so all the time we are here at school. I, too, have found some relations of our mother who allow me to live with them—though I still sing occasionally in the streets and collect alms when money is needed.

" Martin is the cleverest fellow I know. He is far ahead of his fellow scholars in Latin and Greek, and makes such rapid progress in all branches of education as to absolutely astonish his masters. Our Master Trebonius makes of him a special favourite, and

evidently thinks he will become a great and learned man.

"I hope you are well, dear Gretchen, and that you do not worry so much as you used to do about your sins. I am sure you would not willingly commit any, and Martin and I say sometimes that perhaps the priests have not taught people quite right. As Martin says, everyone is so keen about making people do things their own way, and yet perhaps their way is wrong, after all. In matters of religion it ought to be God's way, and the way of the Saints and our Blessed Lady; and, perchance, their way is quite different from what the priests have made it out to be.

"There has been a monk in Italy called Savonarola, who rose up and preached that the Pope was wrong, and that the priests were wrong, and that many, many things that are thought good and right are wicked in God's sight. But the priests and papal authorities seized and killed him. He was strangled, and then burned at the stake.

"It's not right. It's not right to kill men in that way, when all their crime is that they believe differently and teach differently from others.

"The burning of them makes us feel that what they said was unanswerable, and could not be defeated by fair argument. It is heathenish to kill what we cannot answer.

"While studying some old books about the fathers which his Master showed him, Martin came across some lines written by Father Clement of Alexandria, and he was so struck with them that he copied them for you. 'Send them to Gretchen,' he said. 'She's one of His little ones.' So here they are:—

"Lead, Holy One, lead!
The little ones need
The voice of their King
The footsteps of Jesus
Are shining before us
His children to lead—

On the Heavenly way their footsteps to bring."

"That is all, dear Gretchen. It seems that, besides being our terrible Lord Who shall judge us, Jesus is One to be followed, and where He leads is the *right way*. And the right way, my Gretchen, must be that which leads to Heaven. The right way cannot lead to the wrong place; it cannot lead to hell! So, Gretchen, you follow *in the footsteps of Jesus*. Then you'll be all right.

"But I must stop. The funds have run short, and if I don't go out and sing before the houses of the rich people in this place, there will be no supper for me, or breakfast to-morrow.

"I will send this by a man who I know is going to Erfurt on the morrow. Peace be with you, my brave Gretchen. Greetings from Martin Luther and from me.

"Your truly loving brother,

"JOHN HUTTEN."

Gretchen kissed the letter, and read it over and over again, then she turned to the wondering child, who was staring at her in amazement. "Hannah," she said, "there is something for you, too. This letter gives us directions for our way to heaven. You must learn them. Say after me:—

"Lead, Holy One, lead!
The little ones need," etc.

Little Hannah said the words after her very gravely. Then she began to raise objections. "I can't see any shining footsteps, Gretchen," she said. "So it isn't true, after all."

"But it is, darling," said Gretchen. "You can't see them with your bodily eyes—only there's another way of seeing, and in that way you can."

"I can't see any way, and I'm tired now. Let me go," said the little one.

"All right; run along," answered Gretchen.

When she was alone she lay a long time quite still, with her face to the wall. Then she prayed, not to Mary, not to the Saints, but to the Lord Jesus.

"Help me," she said, "help me, O my King, to see Thy shining footsteps, and to follow them along the heavenly way."

CHAPTER IV

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

THAT letter of John's healed Gretchen's wounded soul, and gave her pleasure and contentment, which, reacting on her sick body, made it whole.

She stole downstairs the next day, with her precious letter hidden in the bosom of her gown, and her aunt found her hard at work in the kitchen preparing vegetables for the dinner.

"Better, Gretchen?" she asked, more kindly than was her wont.

"Yes, aunt," the girl replied, almost cheerfully.

"That's well; but you look pale. You need not work in the kitchen to-day. Take your sewing into the parlour and sit there."

"Thank you," Gretchen answered, gratefully, being quite unaware that her aunt's unusual kindness was due to her having been seriously alarmed at her illness, and afraid that she would be blamed if worse came of it.

From that time matters improved all round for Gretchen. Her relations were more considerate, and put upon her less; and she, with her thoughts full of the "Footsteps of Jesus shining before her, His children to lead," was almost unconsciously striving to act always in the highest and best way.

"If only I knew more about the Lord Jesus, and what He did when He was upon earth," thought Gretchen, "I should be better able to follow in His footsteps. I know so little."

But just because she knew so little, she thought of that little much, saying to herself every morning, noon, and night, her precious verse.

"Doesn't Gretchen look nice?" her cousins said sometimes. "She's prettier than ever, with that sweet expression that comes into her face and stays there. She's like the picture of Our Lady in the Cathedral."

"It's wonderful!" said their mother. "She hadn't that look when she came to us. It has grown on her. If she had a baby in her arms, she would look like the Madonna!"

Then Luke spoke. "It's because she's so good," he said. "She's a big saint is our Gretchen."

"Luke's in love with her," said his sister Sarah.

The youth coloured up, but said nothing.

His mother looked annoyed. It was the wish of her heart that her eldest son should one day marry the daughter of her friend and neighbour, Madame Reinecke, who would have a good dowry.

"Saints don't get married," she said, tartly. "If Gretchen is to be a saint, she will have to go into a convent and become a nun."

It was now more than three years since she came to Erfurt, and she was seventeen years old. Being small and slender in figure, she scarcely looked her age at first sight. But her face, with its sweet Madonna look, was older—almost it might have been a mother's face, so tender and compassionate was its expression.

As she came out of the cathedral one day, Luke met her. He was twenty, and felt himself a man.

"Gretchen," he said, as he turned to walk home by her side, "I have something very serious to say to you."

"Yes, Luke; what is it?" she asked, looking up into his face.

He looked down into the calm depths of her blue eye, and grew troubled. There was no consciousness there of love. Her heart was not awakened to the love of man; it was filled with love for God and the sweetest, tenderest charity and warm affection for her fellows.

The young man felt this, but having begun, he blundered on.

"Gretchen dear, you must have seen I love you. Will you consent to be my wife—one day—after a little time?"

A look of alarm had come into Gretchen's face. "Oh, no! No, thank you, Luke," she hastened to reply. "I'm sorry, but I cannot—I cannot love you."

"Never mind that," he said, shortly. "I don't suppose you can love me. But I'm asking you to say you will marry me—not now, but as soon as I can get a home ready for you."

"But I cannot, Luke," Gretchen answered. "Please, please don't say any more about it. Dear Luke, it is quite impossible."

"If you are thinking of mother, she'll come round. Father always likes you more than any of them—more than anyone, except, of course, mother and their children," Luke blundered on. "You must say, 'Yes,' Gretchen. You're nothing but a servant, or rather a slave, here—you get no wages and you've all the work to do. Haven't I seen it for years? And you, looking like an angel far above the rest of us. Oh, Gretchen, let me make you happy, and——"

She interrupted. "Luke, it can never be. Dear boy, don't say any more. I shall never marry anyone, unless——" She hesitated, the colour had mounted to her cheeks, her blue eyes shone, and she was trembling.

Luke regarded her with jealous eyes.

"There's some other fellow, Gretchen," he said. "You love someone else."

"No one else loves me, if that is what you mean, Luke. No one ever asked me to marry him before to-day. I am much obliged to you, dear Luke, for the honour. But now let me go, for if I were to talk until night I could give you no other answer."

"You've broken my heart!" Luke cried. "And there is another fellow, and I feel as if I could kill him!"

"*Luke!*" Gretchen cried, and there was such a look of indignation on her face as made him quail. "How

can you talk like that? How can you?" And she hurried off into the house, which they had just reached.

Upstairs in her own tiny room in the roof, she tried to think calmly over what had happened. Luke was a mere boy; he would get over the pain of her refusal, and his boyish rage against a possible rival would pass away. It was of that other she thought most—her childhood's friend, Martin Luther. Did she love him? Was it love that made his image rise up before her when Luke was asking her to be his wife? Oh, surely not! She must not love one so much cleverer and more learned than herself. "We were chums," she said to herself, "in the olden days, and now we are friends—the best of friends—that is all. He is glad to think little Gretchen will be at Erfurt to welcome him when he arrives. That is all."

How long he and John were in coming! Martin had been four years at Eisenach now, and John five. And for the last three years, ever since she had received John's letter, she had been looking for them to come.

The girl's services must have been very valuable to Madame Stiefel by that time, for Gretchen did all the work of the house—the cleaning, the cooking, the washing, and the waiting upon everybody; and, better still, the work was always efficiently done and the worker never lost her temper over the doing of it.

"There is no one like her," Jonas Stiefel said. "She must carry about with her some secret charm. I wonder where she got it. I'd buy a lot of it for my whole family if I had the chance."

Little Hannah looked up and her lips moved, but she did not venture to say the words that rose to them. Only to herself she whispered, "It's the footsteps—the golden, shining footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ that our Gretchen is following. They are leading her on the way, *the way to heaven*, so she cannot help doing right."

The day came at last, when she was least expecting it, that brought her brother John and Martin Luther into Erfurt.

It happened that her aunt had sent Gretchen out on an errand to a shop, and she was just leaving the shop with her purchase, when she saw some children staring at two young men, who were coming slowly up the street, limping a little as they walked. The young men carried knapsacks on their backs and their clothes were very dusty. Wayworn and tired they looked, but the dark brown eyes of one of them were shining as he looked forward, above the houses, to the towers of the university on the hill beyond.

"See, John," he cried, in a voice which Gretchen knew quite well. "See, John, the university—the biggest in Germany!"

But John's eyes were attracted elsewhere. "Gretchen!" he cried. "Little Gretchen, is that you?"

"John!" exclaimed Gretchen, springing forward to embrace him.

"Gretchen!" Martin said, giving her his hand, when at last he could get in a word. "This is good!" and he pressed her hand. "I felt sure you would come out to welcome us! Didn't I say so, John?"

"Yes, indeed! Gretchen, don't cry, dear one! Why are you crying?"

Gretchen's full heart overflowed in tears—but they were not tears of sorrow but of joy; and she hastened to tell him so. "I've watched and watched for you these three years," she said, "ever since you wrote the letter, John."

"I suppose you were unable to answer it, Gretchen," he said.

"No," she answered. "I never knew of anyone who was going your way, and I can't write fine like you, John. Besides, I've always been so busy and so hard at work that I've never had time to write."

"Why, what have you been doing?" John asked, still half resenting the fact that she had never answered his letter.

"Following the footsteps," began Gretchen, and then she was interrupted.

A crowd of adults had gathered with the children to stare at the foreigners, as Martin and John were supposed to be, and the young men wanted to get away.

Gretchen would have taken them home to her aunt's house, but this they would not allow. "We have not come here," they said, "to live upon your friends and relations."

"My father has given me money for my support for the present," said Martin, as they walked on. "He is getting on much better than of old, Gretchen. He has a forge now and two furnaces, and by working very hard he is able to put by a little for the future and for me to enable me to get a first-class education."

"But you, John, are related to Aunt Stiefel just as much as I am," Gretchen said wistfully, "so you might come to her house."

"She has offered you a home; she has not offered me one; and, indeed, I could not bear to sponge upon anyone," John replied. "So, dear, I will go with Martin and pay for myself. If we share the same room it will be less money for each of us."

Gretchen was obliged to give way.

"But when shall I see you again?" she said, wistfully.

"I will come and see you, dear," John replied.

Martin said nothing. He was gazing again at the towers of the university, and was plainly eager to get to it. He had not come to Erfurt merely to see a girl.

"We'll get a lodging as near the university as we can," said Martin to John.

"Yes, of course. Good-bye for the present, Gretchen," said John.

Gretchen held up her face for a kiss, but he did not appear to see it. He was frowning at some children who were still following them and staring hard.

Martin, nodding to Gretchen, caught hold of John's

arm, and they turned to mount the hill on the top of which stood the first University in Germany.

Gretchen's heart sank as she returned home. The longed-for meeting had taken place; her brother and Martin had arrived, but they had soon left her, intent on things in which she had no part. She was disappointed, for the knowledge was forced upon her that their relations could never again be quite what they had been in the days gone by. The boys had become young men, and clever ones, too; while she had been standing still, as it were, watching and waiting for them to come, they had been learning many things which she would never know; and now they were full of hopes and ambitions in which she had no share.

So she waited as patiently as she could for them to come to see her. And towards the end of the week John did call; but he was alone, and he seemed to be more attracted by Sarah and Leah, who happened to be at home, than interested in his sister. Indeed he looked at her once or twice with a slight frown, and when they happened to be left alone together for a few minutes he said, "What pretty girls our cousins are! And how nicely they dress! Why won't you dress like them, Gretchen," he went on. "You look so shabby, and—and so plain beside them! And there's another thing: how rough and red your hands are! Can't you keep them in a better state?"

Gretchen looked at him without speaking, and the tears rose to her eyes. Sarah and Leah had nothing to do but dress themselves prettily. They had plenty of money. But she had to do all the housework and scarcely ever had any clothes to wear except their old, cast-off things. But she could not speak just then, and before she could quite command her voice, the opportunity was gone, for Hannah came running in.

"What a pretty child!" exclaimed John, holding out his hand. "Will you kiss me, dear?"

Hannah raised her dimpled face.

"He is my brother John," explained Gretchen.

"Your brother John! Then he'll tell us some more about the footsteps, won't he, Gretchen?" asked the child.

"What footsteps?" inquired John.

Gretchen and little Hannah exchanged glances. He had forgotten all about them! Yes, like many another teacher he had preached to others, but had forgotten to practise what he preached.

He looked relieved when Sarah and Leah entered.

"Do you play the guitar?" he asked, looking from them to a guitar on the table.

Yes; they played and sang duets.

"Will you play for me? Will you sing for me?" asked John, quite eagerly.

They played and sang for him, and then they persuaded him to sing a song he knew by heart. After which he tried a duet with them; and an hour or two passed swiftly by.

Gretchen was obliged to leave the room. She had to cook the dinner, and that kept her in the kitchen a long time. The tears were in her eyes every now and then, and the hot fire made them ache.

"I ought to be glad that John is happy," she said to herself. "But—I can't be. For he is *my* John, not theirs. I have been longing for him to come for years, and they never saw him before to-day. But they have got him. They are enjoying his society, while I am in the kitchen cooking their dinner."

Mrs. Stiefel came out presently, and said that John was going to stay for dinner, and Gretchen must set him a plate and knife and fork at the table. "He appears to be a very accomplished young man," said his aunt, "and he says that his friend Martin Luther plays and sings even better than he, so I have told him to bring his friend next time he comes; and we will have some musical afternoons or evenings."

Mrs. Stiefel returned to the best sitting-room, where

her visitor and daughters were still singing and playing, and Gretchen was left alone.

"I seem to have lost something," said the girl to herself, in grief and bewilderment. "But I have my letter," and her hand stole up to it, that she might reassure herself by touching it, "and John's having forgotten the footsteps does not do away with them. They are still there, shining on the way that I must tread. The way that leads to heaven."

A smile lighted up her face for a moment, and she thought more cheerfully, "After all, it does not so much matter about the boys, for Christ is my Leader, and I am following Him in the right way."

CHAPTER V

GRETCHEN'S OPPORTUNITY

TIME went on, and things continued much in the same way. John paid Leah small attentions when he came to his aunt's, ostensibly to see his sister, though in reality mostly to keep in touch with Leah; and Martin Luther, who occasionally accompanied him, delighted them all with his music and singing, evidently well pleased with the good-looking, well-dressed girls who were always sitting in the parlour waiting to receive and entertain them.

"Gretchen has fallen off in appearance as she has grown older," Martin said once to John, and she heard him as she was coming into the room, and also her brother's rejoinder:—

"Do *you* perceive it, Martin? I was hoping it was only a gruesome fancy of mine. She used to be such a sunny-faced child, and now—well, to tell the truth, I hate to see her look like that."

Poor Gretchen! Tears came into her eyes and fell down into the tray she was carrying. Fearful that they

should see her weeping, she fled to the kitchen, which prevented her hearing the defence which little Hannah made in reply.

"Gretchen's *beautiful*," said the child, with emphasis. "She has the most *beautiful* face in all the world. It's like the Holy Mary in the picture in the church, and sometimes a light comes from it like that of the shining footsteps——"

"She has an advocate in you, little one," Martin said, laying his hand caressingly on the child's pretty hair.

"What footsteps do you mean?" John asked.

Hannah stared at him. "Why, *you* know," she said. "You wrote it in the letter Gretchen carries about with her always." And then, rising, with folded hands, the little girl repeated:—

Lead, Holy One, lead!
The little ones need
The voice of their King.
The footsteps of Jesus
Are shining before us,
His children to lead;
On the Heavenly Way their footsteps to bring.

"Oh, yes, I remember!" John said. "They were the words of the holy Clement. I copied them for Gretchen in that letter she never answered——"

"Methinks she has been more than answering it," Martin said, very thoughtfully, "as she values it so much that she carries it about with her, and has taught it to this child."

"And she *loves* it," little Hannah said.

"Why are you all looking so serious?" asked Sarah, coming into the room. "Come, let us laugh and be merry!" and she commenced to giggle.

Martin turned away from her for the first time with distaste. He bent over the little child to say, "Where is Gretchen, Hannah? Why doesn't she come into the room?"

"I don't know. I'll go and see," answered the child, slipping out of the room.

She found Gretchen hard at work in the kitchen, with red eyes and a tear-stained face, and, flinging her arms around her neck, forgot her errand in seeking to comfort her. So the young men did not see Gretchen any more that day, and Martin, feeling unaccountably disappointed, hurried his friend away.

Young Luther was already attracting great attention at the university. Even amongst the fifteen hundred or so of students he was already distinguishing himself in classics and philosophy and by his great powers of reasoning. His friends and his father at home wanted him to become a great lawyer, and it was with that end in view that he pursued his studies. John, who was much older and not nearly so clever, intended to become a doctor of medicine. As the months quickly lengthened into years, they both took their Bachelor's Degree, and then, in 1502, Martin Luther became a lecturer, and lectured on physics and the ethics of Aristotle in a most brilliant manner.

The students crowded to hear him, and even the professors of the university went to listen when they were able to do so. His genius and ability became much talked about; and for a time he was so absorbed in his work and successes that he did not come with John to the Stiefels.

John could not keep away. He was very much in love with Leah, who flirted with him a great deal, though she could not quite make up her mind as to whether she preferred him to other young men of her acquaintance who were richer.

Sometimes John was very miserable because of her conduct. It was then that he turned to Gretchen for comfort, which she never failed to bestow, mingled with advice to him to think more of his work and less of marrying for the present.

"It is all very well for you to talk, Gretchen,"

he said, "but you don't know what it is to be in love."

"Perhaps I do," Gretchen said softly one day, "but in any case I hope I should never let my affection for one individual blind me to my duty to other people and to God."

Then John startled her by crying out, "Who can please God? Martin and I are often in despair about it. He seems so strange, so malignant almost, if it is not wrong to say so. (Having sent us into this world without giving us any choice in the matter, and with a heritage of sins attached to us from our birth, He expects perfection in our conduct, and, failing that, His wrath lies heavy upon us. We are children of wrath from our babyhood, handicapped with a heritage of sin, prone to evil from the start; and unless we can overcome tremendous odds against us, we are eventually to fall into hell for ever and ever!)"

"No! no! You must not talk like that," Gretchen cried. "You seem to be leaving such a lot of things out."

"What sort of things?" questioned her brother, almost morosely.

Gretchen began as she had been taught.

"The holy Saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the shining footsteps of our Lord." There was extreme tenderness in her tones as she said the last words.

"You think so much of those footsteps, and, after all, it is only a part of a hymn," John said.

Gretchen laid her hand upon his arm. Her blue eyes shone. "It is not only the part of a hymn that is in my heart, dear John," she said. "*The thought of those footsteps is life to me many and many a day.* Yes, when it seems impossible to please God, I think of the footsteps, and try to follow where they lead."

"If you mean the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, they led Him to Gethsemane and the Cross," John said, gloomily.

Gretchen bent her head in assent, and then added, "And beyond, to the right hand of God in Heaven."

"And are you bold enough to think you can follow Him there?" asked John.

"I don't know. I don't think about that. One footstep at a time is enough for me," answered Gretchen.

Another day, it was in the evening, John came into the kitchen where Gretchen was preparing the supper, in no little excitement.

"He's nearly killed himself!" he cried, with tears in his eyes. "Gretchen, he is so dreadfully ill!"

"Martin?" Gretchen asked, but even before her brother answered she knew it was he. "What has he been doing?" she questioned.

"He was setting off on a visit home to see his parents, and walking armed as usual, with his sword on one thigh and his dagger on the other, and somehow his dagger fell from its sheath and cut his foot badly, severing a vein, or rather a main artery. Fortunately a friend was with him, who quickly fetched a physician. The wound was then bound up and he was carried back again into the city, to his rooms, and I was sitting up with him all night, when his wound started bleeding afresh. I did all I was able, and sent for a physician, and he came, looking dreadfully grave. For a time we thought Martin would die, and he thought so himself and committed his soul to the care of the Blessed Mary. Presently, however, he took a turn for the better. But he has lost so much blood! He is very ill—and so low-spirited, Gretchen. It is wretched to see him. I can't comfort him. I wonder if you could?"

Gretchen shook her head. "I'm afraid not now," she said. "Once I was able to comfort him a little when he was in trouble, but not now. I think he despises me now——"

"Nonsense! It's only that you make yourself look such a fright, wearing those old clothes. But he won't notice them now, he is too ill. Come on."

"I'll come," Gretchen said. "I'd do anything to help him." She was in such a hurry to set off that

she did not go to her aunt to ask permission to leave the house, but hastened away with her brother just as she was.

Martin looked up with heavy eyes, when at last they stood by his bed. "What, Gretchen?" he asked. "Have you come to see me die?"

"No, Martin," the girl replied; "I have come to tell you to live."

"Why should I live?" Martin asked, gloomily.

"Because God has work for you to do," Gretchen answered.

"How do you know?"

"I feel it here," and she laid her hand upon her heart.

Martin answered not a word. He was in great depression.

Timidly, Gretchen raised his head to turn the pillow under it. Her touch seemed to soothe him, and he closed his eyes.

"John," whispered the girl, "sing to him. I cannot. But you can sing a Psalm."

Martin recovered from that illness, but he did not lose his despondency; and John, too, became very down-hearted at that time. This made them turn more to Gretchen for consolation than to the cousins, as Leah and Sarah were frivolous and sought to laugh the matter off when they were appealed to.

CHAPTER VI

THE PLAGUE

"GRETCHEN! Gretchen!" called Madame Stiefel, one morning, in tones of agony. "Come here! Come to my bedroom! Look at your uncle! What is the matter with him?"

Gretchen ran into her aunt's bedroom, and stood

by her side, earnestly regarding her uncle, who was lying in bed apparently insensible. His face was pale and livid, and as they stood looking at him he opened his eyes, which were fixed and glassy, and began to talk in a wild, rambling manner.

"He is ill, aunt," said Gretchen; "very ill." She took hold of his hand, which burned like fire. "Uncle," she said, "dear uncle, don't you know me?"

He pushed her hand away, and began declaiming about something quite unintelligibly.

"I'll send one of the boys for a doctor," Gretchen said, hurrying away for that purpose.

Her aunt called after her, "Be quick back! I daren't stay with him by myself."

"Run for the doctor, boys; your father is very ill," Gretchen said, running into the room where the boys slept. "Make haste! Tell him your father's awfully bad."

Her cousins needed no second bidding. They raced each other out of the house, and down the street in the direction of the doctor's house.

"Gretchen! Gretchen!" called her uncle wildly. "Come here!"

But by the time she had reached his bedside he had fallen back into a sort of stupor.

"Gretchen, look here!" said her aunt, lifting the coverlet from one of his arms. "Look how black and how swollen his arm is! God grant that it be not the plague that he has got!"

"The plague!" ejaculated Gretchen. "Oh, but it's not in this city, surely?"

"It's almost all over Germany," replied her aunt. "Your uncle said only last night that he was dreadfully afraid it would be coming here. He was always afraid of having the plague."

"We must pray to the blessed Saints," began Gretchen.

"I know what I shall do if it's the plague," said her

aunt, in hard, metallic tones. "It's all very well to be a good wife," she muttered, "but one has only one life."

The doctor entered, ushered in by one of the boys, whom he curtly dismissed. "Be off, and don't come near this room again," he commanded.

Then he came and stood by the bed. He was a thin, cadaverous-looking man, with a long and narrow face.

"The plague!" he said, laconically, as he looked down on his patient.

"No, doctor, surely not!" wailed Madame Stiefel. For, notwithstanding what she had just said to Gretchen, it was too terrible to have what she feared put into words by the man who knew.

"I say it is the plague," repeated the doctor. "One glance showed me that. There are now ten cases in this city." He turned sharply to Gretchen. "Leave the room," he said. "Only one must wait upon the patient; infection is deadly."

"Stay!" screamed Madame Stiefel, looking imploringly at Gretchen. "You have touched him. *You* held his hand. The mischief has been done. *You must stay and nurse him.* I have my other children to think of. I must take them away."

"Send them away at once by all means," said the doctor; "but surely, as a wife, you will remain to nurse your husband?"

"No, no!" the woman repeated, going to the door. "Good-bye, Gretchen! Do your best for him."

"But, aunt," protested Gretchen, "when he recovers consciousness he will want you."

Her aunt made no reply. She was in such a hurry to leave the room that she could only wave her hand, and the next moment she had disappeared.

"A heartless woman!" commented the doctor. "You'll have to nurse him," he added, looking down again at his patient.

"What? Another has got the plague! Take it and begone!" cried the shopkeeper, thrusting it into her hand.

She ran back to the house, got a cup, and rushed upstairs to the bedroom.

The doctor was awaiting her with impatience. "I have already stayed too long," he said, pouring some into the cup and adding a little water. "Make him drink this, and repeat the dose in an hour or two. Heap bed-clothes upon him until he perspires violently. And burn some cypress and juniper wood in a brazier with resin and myrrh in this room, and keep him very hot. That's all."

He was hurrying away when Gretchen called after him, "How can I get the things? I am all alone."

"Heaven help you! I know not," replied the medical man, hurrying away.

Gretchen raised the cup to her uncle's lips. He drank thirstily, and then once more commenced to rave in delirium, while his face, which had been so pallid, became flushed and red.

In considerable alarm Gretchen stood at a little distance, watching him and listening to the wild words which he poured out unceasingly.

She tried to pray, but found it difficult to do so, as she felt numbed and bewildered by the desertion of her relatives and the cruel, isolated position in which she found herself. Thinking that perhaps the light troubled her patient, she turned to the window to draw its curtain, when her eyes fell on a bonfire in the street, not far from the house. If no one had brought her the disinfecting woods to burn in the house, at least they were burning them outside in the street. She could see them busily heaping on branches and watching them burn.

Sayings which had been uttered in her presence when she was busily working, recurred to her memory. The plague was called "The Black Death." It was devastating Europe, and mowing down the people like grass.

Jonas Stiefel opened his eyes again, looking up at the doctor with an expression of great anguish. "Have I got the plague, doctor?" he cried. "The plague?"

"You are ill," answered the doctor. "Now you must do everything I tell you, or I shall go away."

"I've got the plague!—the plague!" wailed the unhappy man.

"Never mind, uncle! I am here," Gretchen said, in his ear.

"*You?* Oh, take her away! Take her away, doctor, or she will have it," cried Jonas. "Gretchen's worth the whole lot of them; she must not risk her life! Where's my wife? Where's my wife?"

"She's gone—it must be this young woman or no one," said the doctor.

"Gone! My wife gone!" cried the wretched man, and then he began again rambling wildly in delirium.

The doctor whipped out his lancet and bled him in the arm. Then he bound up the wound and bade Gretchen fetch the medicine he prescribed.

"I will run and fetch it at once," she said.

"You must not go for it," said the doctor. "Send one of the children."

Gretchen left the room and called to her cousins. But there was no answer. She ran from room to room, but only to discover that they were empty. Already her aunt and cousins had gone. They had left the house in a panic, just as they were, and only stopping a moment to snatch up money and valuables.

"They have all gone. They have left me quite alone," thought the girl.

Running out into the street she besought a man who was passing to fetch her the medicine. He looked at her in horror. "What? Have you got the plague in your house?" he cried, in terrified tones, and ran away from her.

She hurried down a street, and, standing outside the shop, begged for a bottle of the medicine.

"What? Another has got the plague! Take it and begone!" cried the shopkeeper, thrusting it into her hand.

She ran back to the house, got a cup, and rushed upstairs to the bedroom.

The doctor was awaiting her with impatience. "I have already stayed too long," he said, pouring some into the cup and adding a little water. "Make him drink this, and repeat the dose in an hour or two. Heap bed-clothes upon him until he perspires violently. And burn some cypress and juniper wood in a brazier with resin and myrrh in this room, and keep him very hot. That's all."

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Sayings which had been uttered in her presence when she was busily working, recurred to her memory. The plague was called "The Black Death." It was devastating Europe, and mowing down the people like grass.

It was highly contagious. Not without reason had her aunt fled. Gretchen supposed she would take it and die, but, strangely enough, she did not fear.

"At least I am following the footsteps now," she said to herself, "if I never did before." Then she took courage to face the future.

All that day Gretchen watched alone by the sick man, only leaving him at times to fetch wood and water from downstairs, or to answer the door. The doctor did not return, and towards night the patient became worse, and violent in his delirium. It was with difficulty the girl could keep him in bed, and the idea of having to pass the night alone with him was appalling. The strain on her nerves was very great, and, as the evening closed in and night approached, she felt extremely weary.

Night came on, and, hour after hour, found her struggling with her patient, in the endeavour to keep him in bed, or watch beside him as he slept, and, at last, when morning dawned, she was dozing also—for in truth she was worn out.

About noon the next day, the doctor walked in, looked at the patient and at her, and then, told her to persevere with the treatment, and was going away, but she stopped him.

"Will you be so kind as to order food to be sent in for me?" she said, "otherwise we shall have none."

He departed, and, in due course, sent in meat and other things; but no nurse came to the house, and Gretchen found that she would again have to nurse her uncle through the night, alone and unaided.

Tired out as she was, the ordeal was very severe, but she got through it, and, when morning came, it found poor Jonas sleeping peacefully.

About twelve o'clock that morning there was a loud knock at the house door, and, on going down to answer it, Gretchen saw her brother and Martin Luther standing on the doorstep.

"Stand back! Don't come in! Keep away for your lives!" she gasped, being smitten with fear that they would catch the plague.

"Gretchen, are you mad? What is the matter? You look awfully ill!" they cried, simultaneously.

"The plague! It is the plague!" answered Gretchen. "Uncle has it badly. I am nursing him. Don't come near me! Don't touch me." She caught hold of the door and clung to it, for everything seemed to be going round.

"Gretchen!" cried her brother, "you are ill. Keep back, Martin! Don't you see? Cannot you see the black spots?" He added the last words in a low aside. "Gretchen has got the plague!"

She swayed, putting out her hand to keep him off; then she fell, but he caught her ere she reached the floor.

CHAPTER VII

A DREADFUL BLOW

"**W**HERE am I? What is the matter? John, is it you?" Gretchen asked feebly. Six days had passed since she was struck down by the plague, and now the crisis was past and she was beginning slowly to recover.

The man by the window turned to answer her, and she saw that it was not John, but her cousin Luke.

"You have been very ill," he said, coming towards her, and revealing a white, drawn face. "You have been very, very ill, dear Gretchen, but you are recovering."

"Who has nursed me?" Gretchen asked, adding, as memory returned, "Did John and Martin Luther stay?"

"I know nothing of Martin Luther," Luke replied, "but I returned home, three days ago, to find the

house empty, except for three persons who were ill in bed."

"*Three!*" Gretchen said. "Three! What do you mean? Uncle was ill of the plague—I nursed him; and you found me ill of it, too; but who was the third?"

Luke was silent. He put a cup to his cousin's lips, begging her to drink a restorative, then, as she hesitated, he said in a stern manner that he would not answer her unless she drank.

Gretchen drank, and felt revived and even exhilarated. "Who was the third?" she repeated.

"Your brother John," answered Luke, with averted eyes.

"John! Then he caught the plague from me! Oh, poor John! I tried to send him away—I tried—then I knew no more." She paused, looking at Luke most searchingly.

He did not speak. His face was still averted. He was waiting for the question which he knew would follow.

"Luke!" cried Gretchen, "Luke, where is John? Why do you look away from me?" There was great fear in her tones.

"He was ill and in great pain, but he is out of his pain now. He does not suffer any longer, Gretchen, dear," said Luke, tenderly.

Gretchen lay still for a little while, with tears slowly rolling down her cheeks. She was too weak to wipe them away, so Luke did this as tenderly as a woman, talking at the same time in a gentle, soothing voice.

"It is well with John," he said. "It is well with John now. He had been doing his best for you. For three days he nursed you and his uncle, and then his turn came. He fought against 'The Black Death' with all his might, struggling to attend to you, till it was impossible for him to do it any longer."

"Dear John! It was just like him. He always used to be like that," sobbed Gretchen, her tears falling fast, as she recalled his unfailing kindness to her when

she was a child. She felt crushed to think that he was dead, and that she would never again see him in this world.

"He died happily," Luke said.

"Happily?" questioned Gretchen wonderingly, as she recalled his bitter words against God, Whom he thought cruel.

"Yes, very happily. Let me tell you about it, dear. After the bitter pains and his ravings in delirium he fell asleep, and awoke in a very different state of mind."

"'I've been dreaming I saw the Lord Jesus,' he said, 'nailed to His Cross. And a voice said in my ear, 'Why did He die? Why? Why? Why?'—three times—and then, I knew—all at once I knew—He died that I might live. He paid the penalty for my sins, so that I might be forgiven. I can't explain how it was I knew, but I did know.' John lay still then, with such a glad expression of his countenance. 'Tell Martin,' he said, 'tell Martin Luther and Gretchen, dear little Gretchen—and—and Leah.' Those were the last words he said, and a smile rested on his face when he lay dead."

Gretchen lay very still, with her eyes closed, but her agonised expression of countenance was gone, and a little smile flitted across her face. John was dead, but he had died in peace. A blessed vision had been sent to him for his consolation. It was well with her dear brother—and she—she must get along as she could.

Presently her uncle came in, leaning on his son's arm, and looking ill and haggard. He placed his hand gently on Gretchen's head, saying with great feeling. "God bless you, my child, and reward you for saving my life."

Gretchen looked up at him wonderingly. Had she indeed saved his life?

"Yes, indeed you did!" he said, answering her thought. "The doctor said I owed my life to your nursing. When my own wife and children deserted me

and left me to my fate, you pluckily remained and did everything for me. I shall never forget it! Never!"

"I am glad to have been useful," Gretchen said, adding, "And I owe my life, under God, to Luke."

"Ah, we might all have died if it had not been for him," said Luke's father with deep feeling, looking round for his son.

But Luke had disappeared. Seizing the opportunity while his patients were together, he was cooking, cleaning, and doing housework with the utmost diligence—for no one would come in to do the work, owing to the plague.

Afterwards, when he rejoined his father and cousin, they asked if he had no fear of catching the fell disease.

He looked down for a moment or two, and then up into their faces, with a light on his own.

"I will confess," he said, "that I was horribly afraid at first. You see, what made me feel worse was that I felt sure if I died I should go straight to hell. As I entered Erfurt, and saw the signs of death—the closed houses, the fires of cypress wood, juniper, myrrh, and green pine in the streets, the fear in the faces of the people as they hurried to and fro, the numerous funeral processions, the fact that sometimes mourners regarding each other discovered signs of the plague and screamed, 'You also have it! I can see the black spots!' and the mournful tolling of the church bells—I felt dreadfully upset. In fact I fled into one of the open churches, hoping to get help and comfort there.

"But a priest was declaiming terrible things to the frightened people who were gathered together there. 'The wrath of God,' he was saying, 'is being poured out upon you, because of the wickedness of your hearts! Ye are vile, ye are vile in His sight, and He is visiting you for your transgressions, and will thoroughly purge His floor,' and so on, and so on; all hard words and cruel, levelled at the heads and hearts of the wretched people, some of whom fainted as they listened and had to be carried out. My mind revolted from such things,

and, having passed out of the church, I felt a hatred such as I had never felt before against the priests and—God forgive me!—against God Himself. But outside the church an old man seized my hand.

“‘Stay,’ he said. ‘I *know* how you are feeling. I have felt that way myself. Young man, it is wrong, it is monstrous of the priests to preach as they do at this crisis. Listen! They are blind teachers of the blind. They leave out the *Lord Jesus Christ*. They have effaced the picture of Him in the hearts of men; just as John Huss in his vision saw the popes and the bishops effacing the features of Christ, which he had caused to be painted on the walls of his study. But the next day Huss saw the picture of Christ being painted in again, and *so it shall be*. For a time they have hidden our Lord, but it will not be always so. He shall be found and raised up before the eyes of all people. He who died upon the Cross *will save us*.’ That and more he said to me, and a Voice in my heart said that it was the truth. So I took courage, came home, and was able to do my duty. That’s all.”

“They were brave words and true,” Jonas said; “brave, for the man might have been imprisoned for heresy, and true because, like you, Gretchen, I feel they are so.”

“I thank God he spoke as he did,” Luke said, “for he calmed my fears and made me aware that if death were to come I should be safer doing my duty than in any other way.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE MENDICANT MONK

THE absence of Martin Luther during her illness and the long days of convalescence puzzled and pained Gretchen a good deal. She remembered that he was with her brother John when the

latter came to the house in time to discover that she was ill of the plague, and that was all she knew. Luke told her that young Luther did not come near the house after that day.

Was he afraid of the plague? Could it be possible that he would desert his friend John in the hour of danger? "Oh, no! no!" said Gretchen to herself. "Something must have happened. Perhaps he is ill. Perhaps the cruel plague has seized him, and he is dead." She shuddered at the thought. Was death to have all whom she loved most dearly?

Gretchen kept house for her uncle and cousin Luke, and was made much of by them both. Jonas insisted upon giving her a salary, or dress allowance, as he called it, equal to the amount he had given each of his elder daughters before they went away.

"And you *earn* it, which they did *not*," he said with emphasis.

One morning, when Gretchen was at work as usual, there was a knock at the door, and, on going to answer it, she perceived a monk, in the grey gown and cowl of the Augustines, with a heavy sack on his shoulders.

He was collecting alms in the shape of food, and, as he stood there humbly waiting for the expected offering, the girl in amazement recognised Martin Luther.

When she last saw him he was a University man, who had just commenced his career as a lecturer, and he was admired and much sought after by professors as well as students, who saw in him a man whose future would be great and glorious in the annals of learning. Now, it seemed, he had laid aside this brilliant prospect, and, having beggared himself of all, was humbly collecting alms for the poor.

Gretchen could not go to fetch the bread she would have given the poor monk, but stood as if rooted to the spot, with scared eyes fixed on his face. It was worn and hollow, and bore the marks of extreme asceticism and much mental suffering.

"Martin," Gretchen faltered at length, "Martin, what does this mean?"

He looked at her wistfully, and for a moment or two did not reply. It was against the rules of the convent for him to talk or linger on his way.

"Martin," cried Gretchen, "don't you care that John has died?" And big tears rose to her eyes.

He started violently, and then burst into hurried speech. "Yes, I heard it in the convent," he said. "My confessor told me of his death. I say *many prayers* for him."

"Why? Oh, why have you become a monk?" Gretchen asked, pale to the lips.

"To save my soul," he said. "Listen, and I will tell how it was that I left the world. Your brother made me leave him at the door when he found you were ill. I meant to return on the morrow, but was sent for home as my mother was ill, and the next day I started to go to her. I was feeling sad, for my friend Alexis had been assassinated, and I was in the forest, when a thunderstorm broke over my head. I was alone. There was no shelter near. The storm raged violently, darkness came on, thunder and lightning succeeded each other. And at last the lightning seemed to tear up the ground beneath my feet. I felt stunned and dazed, and the crashing thunder was to me the Voice of God. I thought that He was angry with me, and I cried aloud for mercy.

"But the storm raged on. Fearful for my life and more for my soul, lest it should be plunged into hell for ever and ever, I made a vow that if God would save me I would become a monk. The storm passed away, but my vow remained. There was no escaping it. I took leave of my friends, and entered the new convent of the Eremites of St. Augustine."

Tears fell down Gretchen's face as she listened. Martin Luther would be as one dead to the world. Even now he was looking impatiently at his sack. Earthly

friendship was of less importance to him than the humble duties imposed upon him by his superiors in the cloister.

The girl fetched a loaf, and Martin bowed low, and murmured thanks in Latin. Then he said, as he shouldered his load: "I must not talk any more. I shall have to do heavy penance because of my sin in talking to you. Good-bye, Gretchen. God and the holy Saints be with you."

That was all. He passed on, and Gretchen turned back sadly into the house.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRECIOUS BOOK

"GRETCHEN, dear," Jonas Stiefel said to her one evening, after they had sat together for some time in silence, "don't you think Luke is a very good fellow?"

"Yes, indeed I do," answered the girl. "When I think of the way in which he nursed me when I was so dreadfully ill—at the risk of his own life, too—I am quite overcome. He is about perfect, I think," she concluded with glistening eyes, for the tears came readily as she thought of that terrible time when she lay ill and helpless at death's door.

"Well, I think so, too. I never knew a young man improve as he has; he's a right *good* fellow!"

"He is *indeed*!" Gretchen acquiesced heartily.

"Then, Gretchen, my dear, you'll excuse my asking you, but couldn't you promise to marry him after all he has done for you? His life's happiness is bound up with yours." Jonas spoke very earnestly.

"Oh, uncle!" Gretchen looked up in dismay. "I'm sorry," she faltered, "but I cannot—I cannot marry him."

"My dear, why not? He has a sufficient income

to maintain you in comfort, and you have just said he is about perfect."

"So he is, and he has been so good to me, so very good," Gretchen repeated.

"Then, my dear, why cannot you believe he will make a good husband——"

"Oh, I am sure he will," interrupted Gretchen.

"None could be better."

"Then why not marry him?" persisted Jonas.

"Because I should not like to give him less than he gives me," Gretchen answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Luke loves me with a pure, whole-hearted love," Gretchen said; "and I"—she sighed—"alas, cannot give him that. Therefore I will not marry him. I will not. For, uncle, it seems to me wrong and sinful to accept a man's love, and then give him only a subterfuge for the real thing."

"Well, child, well, perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, I am sorry for Luke. He is such a good fellow."

"And just because he is such a good fellow I would not wrong him," Gretchen said, in a decided manner.

Jonas reported his non-success, as an advocate, to his son, who thereupon resolved to speak once more to Gretchen on that subject himself. He found an opportunity one evening before supper. Gretchen was going out to the well to draw water. Luke took the can from her, and carried it to the well. Then he drew the water.

"Thank you!" said Gretchen. "You are very good to me, Luke."

"Good to you? Who wouldn't be? Oh, my dear, my dear, if you would only let me be good to you always!" The young man looked at her with the utmost affection. "It would be my joy to screen you and care for you all the days of my life," he said. "I have loved you ever since the day you first came here—a little timid girl, with big eyes which always seemed to be appealing for help. Mother was so hard on you

in those days, and my sisters were horrid, but I did all I could to make matters better—I——”

“Oh, I know you did!” Gretchen cried. “And you have saved my life by nursing me during my illness. You are about perfect, Luke, so far as kindness and goodness go, and I ought to love you with all my heart; but love is such a wayward thing, it won’t be forced. And I do not love you, dear Luke, in the way you want. I wish I did.”

“Ah, well, you can’t help it, dear. I must wait a while; perhaps you will in time.” But Luke sighed wearily.

Not very long afterwards, Gretchen received a letter from Martin Luther. He had never written to her before, and she was proportionately surprised and pleased.

He began by expressing sympathy with her in her bereavement, and then went on to say:—

“Will you pray for me sometimes, dear Gretchen, for I am often very miserable? My sins take such deep hold of me—I thought it would be different when I entered this convent, but it is easy to sin here. There are so many rules, so many regulations, and I forget and break them. Then I do penance, and torment myself almost to death, in order to procure peace with God to my troubled and agitated conscience. But I do not find it. Perchance it is even a sin to tell you this; but you are *Gretchen*—it is comforting to confide in you.

“I have one consolation here, and it is a great one. In the library belonging to the convent there is a Latin Bible. It is very precious, for there are very few of them to be had. I spend hours and hours studying it. Verily it is the Book of God. Wonderful things are contained in it.

“The Vicar-General, Staupitz, called my attention to it, and bade me study it well and diligently; he also gave me great and good words of counsel. When, over-

come with grief, I one day exclaimed in his presence, 'Oh, my sin! My sin! My sin!' he said, 'Know that Jesus Christ is the Saviour even of those who are great, real sinners and in every way deserving of condemnation.'

"Jesus Christ as the Saviour is a new thought to one who has looked on Him only as a Judge, to be pleaded with on our behalf by His Mother and the saints.

"Little Gretchen, I thought I would write to you with my own hand, to tell you to look upon Him in this blessed new light. And truly, as a dear old monk said to me when I was ill, it is written in our Creed, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins.'"

The letter ended with a request that she would not write to him nor speak to him if they met. He signed himself, "Fra Luther," instead of by the new name of Augustine, which he had assumed on entering the convent.

CHAPTER X

THE LETTER FROM ROME

MARTIN LUTHER'S letter was a very great help and comfort to Gretchen, who read it over and over again, until she knew every word by heart.

She was very happy now, and grew positively beautiful—for there is no beautifier like happiness and holiness of heart and life.

Luke found it difficult sometimes to be in her presence without revealing his great love; and yet it was a joy to him to serve her and procure little things for her enjoyment.

Finding out that she was deeply interested in everything that concerned Martin Luther, he sought every opportunity of conversing with the monks and so gaining information about him. This he related to Gretchen, who was thankful to him for telling her.

In this way Gretchen learnt that Martin Luther had been released from the drudgery which the monks put upon him at first, making him clean the cells, perform the functions of watchman, open and shut the gates, sweep the church, and be household servant to the cloister, as well as sending him out into the town to beg for bread. But his lessened labours only gave him more time for the severest mortifications he thought it right to endure. Once he was found in a swoon in his cell, and only brought round when the young choristers of the convent came and sang a soft anthem. Their sweet voices acted like a charm on the poor monk, who loved music so dearly, and he gradually recovered.

Then there were tidings that he was happier, and that new light was being vouchsafed to him.

His ordination followed, and his poor old father came over to be present at it, bringing some friends with him and a present of money. This was a great concession on his part, as he had been much angered by his son's becoming a monk, after all the exertions he had made to pay for his education for the law.

After that Luther was appointed to a chair in the University of Wittenberg. He was to be a professor there, appointed to teach philosophy and dialectics, and meanwhile he would live in the convent of the Augustines at Wittenberg.

Erfurt seemed very empty to Gretchen after he had gone; she had had no other communication with him since she received his letter; still, to know that he was in the same town was something. Now it was astonishing how she missed him; the thought that he was within reach could no longer comfort her.

Then, after some time, she received once more a letter from him, and this time a very remarkable one. It bore the single address, "Rome," and began—

"To Gretchen, greetings. The Lord be with you, my sister.

"I have come to Rome on a pilgrimage, and here

my soul has been sorely vexed with the ungodliness on every side.

"But now I have great and glorious news to tell you, and scarce know where to begin. My whole life—or, rather, the religion which is my life—is changed; and to you, who seek the truth, I hasten to impart it.

"You know the Pope promised an indulgence to everyone who should on his knees climb up some steps called Peter's Stair, which was said to have been brought over to Rome from Jerusalem. I was determined to gain the indulgence, but when I was about half-way up the steps I heard a voice like thunder, crying out in my heart, '*The just shall live by faith.*' These words seemed to me to be uttered by an angel of God, and I arose in amazement, and, ashamed of my folly in having been so superstitious, I fled from the place.

"Now I know that *faith justifies us in the sight of God, and not works.* But good works follow redemption, as fruit appears on the tree. Nobody has died for our sins but Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

"I think it good to tell you this, dear Gretchen, for I know that, like me, you have long sought after the truth."

He again signed himself "Fra Martin," and Gretchen understood that it was as a brother he wrote to her, and that being so she felt no hesitation in allowing her uncle and Luke to read the letter, which they did, much to their satisfaction.

"It seems to me," said Jonas, "that we have already experienced this faith of which Martin Luther speaks; but his letter helps us to grasp it more closely and understand the good of it."

"I suppose it just means," said Luke, "that we are to be sure and certain that the Lord Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins, and, that being so, we are to lead a new and better life. We must do so if we believe properly."

"Yes." Gretchen struck in, "he says that a good

life follows faith as naturally as fruit appears on a tree."

Luke understood something else from the letter, but he did not mention that until he was alone with Gretchen, then he said shyly, "He has only loved you as a brother, Gretchen, dear."

"Yes," she said, "as a dear brother." But she sighed as she turned away.

Luke followed her to the door. "Dear," he said, "when one makes a mistake, such as loving the wrong person, one can sometimes pull oneself up and begin over again."

Gretchen made no response. Her heart was far too full to think of new beginnings.

Luke looked after her wistfully. Would she ever change? Would she ever see, and, seeing, appreciate his lifelong devotion? He could not tell. He could only wait for time to help him.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURN OF MADAME STIEFEL

SEVERAL years passed quietly by, during which Gretchen kept house for her uncle and cousin, and was treated by them with the greatest courtesy. She was indeed like a little queen in their home, and her slightest wish was law to the two men. Never before had she been made so much of, or treated so well, and, with a heart at peace about religion, and convinced of the loyalty and love of her companions, her whole nature seemed to expand and become more beautiful than it had ever been. John was not forgotten, but his memory was hallowed by the knowledge that he died in the right faith and consequently in peace.

Sometimes it seemed to Gretchen as if this happy state of things was too good to last, but it did last until

these years were over, then suddenly it came to an end.

One day, as they were sitting in the parlour, the house-door opened, and a woman entered the room without knocking. She was shabbily dressed, and so altered in appearance, that for a few moments no one recognised her.

"Now then, what do you want, coming into a man's house in this way?" Jonas asked, roughly, annoyed at the intrusion.

"I want a great deal," answered the woman, staring boldly at him. "Jonas, I want my husband and my home."

"You!" cried the man, starting to his feet, with his eyes flashing with anger. "Is it you, Martha?"

"Yes, it is I," answered his wife. "You have not sought me, Jonas; but I have come home. After all—I am your wife."

"The less said about that the better!" retorted the man. "It is no thanks to you that I am alive."

His wife seated herself in her old chair and frowned at Gretchen, who was asking kindly how she was.

Ignoring the girl, the woman demanded of Jonas:—

"Had not our children any claim on me?"

"Yes, of course they had," her husband answered, "but you could have sent them away from here."

"And thrown away my own life at the same time? No, thank you." Her eyes blazed with anger.

"Where are they now?" asked her husband after a pause.

"The boys are working in different places. They are good lads. Sarah and Leah are married. Sarah's husband is a man of violent temper, scarcely a day passes without their quarrelling. It is a wretched marriage. Leah did better. She married a very rich old man, and governs him entirely. But she will not do anything to help me, because I made her marry him. That's gratitude if you like!"

"And Hannah?" It was Gretchen who asked the question eagerly. Not a day passed without her praying earnestly for Hannah. She had sought for news of the girl wherever there seemed a chance of finding her, but in vain.

"Hannah? Oh, that girl became a nuisance. Neither her sisters nor I could do anything with her, and so we left her at Wittenberg."

"You left her? You forsook her?" cried Jonas and Gretchen simultaneously, while Jonas sprang to his feet, as if he would start off that very moment in search of her.

"Who forsook me?" ejaculated Madame Stiefel. "A fine man you are, Jonas, to talk about forsaking!"

"The boot is on the other foot, madame," replied her husband. "It was you who forsook me when I was at the point of death."

"Well, and I did right. I would do it again," snapped his wife.

"Aunt, where is Hannah?" Gretchen said.

"Mother, where is the child?" demanded Luke.

"I know not," answered his mother, callously. "She was a great trouble to us, and so we parted with her, as I have said, at Wittenberg."

"I did think you would be good to your own children!" cried Jonas, excitedly. "Even the beasts care for those of their own flesh and blood!"

"Now then, call me what you like, I don't care! I have come to stay," rejoined madame, wrathfully.

"But I might have known, I might have known," repeated Jonas, "that you, who left your own husband at the point of death, would be only too likely to forsake your little girl."

"She was so fond of you and of Gretchen, and it was that which provoked me," his wife exclaimed.

Mutual recriminations followed, and for some little time Gretchen and Luke found it impossible to obtain an answer to their questioning as to Hannah's whereabouts.

At last, Madame Stiefel declared that she had not the least idea where she was. The woman to whom she handed over Hannah, for a consideration, was only staying at Wittenberg on a visit—where she lived. Hannah's mother did not inquire.

"Leah knows, I think," she vouchsafed at last. "Leah told me she had seen her once or twice."

"Where does Leah live?" they asked.

"She lives with her old man at a place called Elberg, a few miles distant from Wittenberg. That is why she saw more of Hannah than we did. I went to stay with Sarah, but she and her husband led such a life I was glad to leave them." Madame Stiefel helped herself to some of the food which Luke pushed towards her.

"And you call yourself a mother!" Jonas cried, bitterly.

"The pot shouldn't call the kettle black!" retorted his wife. "What pains have you taken to find your children?"

Jonas winced. In his anxiety not to meet his treacherous wife again he had refrained from looking for her and the children, although Gretchen had sometimes begged him to try to find Hannah. Now he felt miserably conscious that the poor child had been deserted by *both* her parents.

As one who had been roughly awakened out of sleep, he deplored his unfatherly behaviour, and instantly set about making inquiries of neighbours who had been to Wittenberg; none of whom, however, proved able to throw any light upon the matter, and so he was baffled and disappointed.

In the meantime his wife made everyone in the house most uncomfortable and unhappy. She had contracted drunken habits, and she cared for nothing so long as she could satisfy her craving for strong drink. Gretchen exerted all her influence in vain, the only result of her efforts to save the unhappy woman from

herself, was that Madame Stiefel hated her and sought to drive her from the house. ~~But~~

"You cannot remain here with my mother," Luke said to Gretchen one day; "she hates you so dreadfully and has so little control over herself that something will be happening if you both live under the same roof."

"Yes; I feel you are right," Gretchen said, "and I have made up my mind that I will go in search of Hannah. I have saved a little money out of the liberal allowance your father has made me, and that, I think, will be sufficient for the purpose."

"But I want to go in search of Hannah," Luke said. "I only lingered here because I did not like to leave you with mother."

"Then we will both go," Gretchen said.

"If you will marry me I will take you with me," Luke returned. "It will be easy then," he added, simply.

"*Luke!*" Gretchen said, reproachfully. Would he bribe her to marry him?

"Forgive me, dear. But I cannot very well take you about the country unless we are married."

"Would you have me marry you from motives of convenience?" Gretchen queried, reproachfully. "I must go alone."

But when Jonas heard of her determination, he declared that she should not go alone, for he would accompany her himself. "We will go together in search of Hannah," he said. "And you must stay at home to look after your mother, Luke."

"I would rather go in search of Hannah," began the young man.

"We are going in search of Hannah," said his father, nodding to Gretchen. "And you," he continued, turning to Luke, "must stay at home and look well after your mother. There is the enemy she puts into her mouth; you must circumvent him, my son, and allow no compromise."

"All right," said Luke, acquiescing, and at the same time wincing a little at the sight of Gretchen's look of relief.

LEAH'S WICKEDNESS

CHAPTER XII

LEAH'S WICKEDNESS

"**N**OW then, you stupid old creature! What do you want?"

"Leah, don't speak to me like that! However stupid I may be, I am your husband—yes, I am your husband," whined old Professor Beaumann.

"A pretty husband you are! You old mummy!" stormed Leah.

Professor Beaumann was a frail old man, whose high forehead and clear-cut features betokened intellect. A man of learning he certainly was, and one who enjoyed a fair reputation in his country. After being a bachelor throughout an average lifetime, he had, in a weak moment, given way to the importunity of Leah Stiefel, who had entered his service as housekeeper, and made her his wife, to his own lasting sorrow.

Having secured him and his money, Leah rapidly developed into a tyrant, and led the poor old man a wretched life. He was too weak, both physically and mentally, to escape from her or to assert his rights; and bitterly, most bitterly, did he rue having made her his wife.

In anything that concerned himself he no longer appealed to her, but he was too good not to dare to do so when the welfare of another, and that other a young girl, was at stake.

"I tell you, Leah," he said, holding on to the table as he spoke, "John Prattenberg told me last night that your young sister Hannah was being shamefully used by those people who took her into their service. They are nothing better than thieves, and, because she will not steal for them, they are ready to kill her."

Leah did not answer for some time. She went on with her work as if her husband had not spoken, and her rough and jerking movements betrayed temper. Leah then took up a broom and began to sweep the

room, sending the dust over him in clouds—a state of things which he particularly abhorred.

He began to cough violently as the dust impeded his breathing, and held up shaking hands in a gesture of entreaty.

But to no purpose. Leah went on tormenting him, and even laughed as she did it.

The old man was driven to the door in his efforts to escape from the dust. He lifted the latch. Outside, the rain was falling in torrents. He looked at it, and then back at the dust, and through the dust at the figure of the virago who was stirring it up. Then, with a bitter cry, he tottered out into the rain—a cowed and broken down old man, hovering on the verge of the grave.

Leah banged the door to after him, threw her broom into a corner, and went down on her knees to search to the bottom of an old oak chest blackened with age. Soon she found what she was looking for, and drew out a bag of money and a piece of parchment.

"His will," she muttered, "leaving everything to me. I have it now, and will hide it, lest he should destroy the precious document."

She took the will into the other room, and, standing on a table, hid it in a hole in the wall, very high up, where he would be unable to search.

"There! I'm safe," she said to herself. "Now I don't care how soon he dies. Indeed, the sooner he is out of the way the better."

She went to the window and stood watching the rain for a little while with an evil expression. The old man was out in it, by now he would be soaked to the skin. That would doubtless give him a chill, which might result in his death.

"I shall have my freedom then," she said to herself. "What's that knocking at the door? It is he—I won't go."

Rap! rap! rāp! The knocking continued. But Leah took no notice of it. "He may knock!" she said

to herself. "Horrid old man! I've got what I want out of him!"

No thought of her sister's plight appealed to her. Seven years before, when little Hannah was troublesome because of her craving to go home to her father and Gretchen, Leah had assisted her mother to sell, yes, literally sell, her into bondage as a little, unpaid servant, to some people who were strangers to them, but who agreed to take her away with them to another place.

"Madame Beaumann! Madame Beaumann!" a neighbour was crying aloud at the door. "The professor is out in the rain, on the slippery path by the river! He will not return for my pleading, but do you go and fetch him home! Fetch him home!"

In spite of her efforts not to hear, the shrill tones reached Leah's ears at last, and the repeated "Fetch him home!" constrained her to open the door, but when she was on the point of so doing, she changed her mind and sat down again.

An idea had occurred to her, and she proceeded to think it over.

Never had she seen anyone whom she felt that she so nearly loved as John Hutten. He was poor, and therefore, when fear of the plague caused her and her mother to leave Erfurt, she made up her mind to give him up. But now the thought occurred to her that after her old man's death, when she would have more money than she could spend, it would not be a bad plan to return to Erfurt and marry John. No tidings of his death had reached her, and she felt convinced that she could win back his love if she liked.

Sunk in these reflections she did not notice how the time was passing; she mechanically set the table for the meal; and, as she was doing so, a noise in the street into which the house opened brought her to the window, and then she saw some men carrying a stretcher, covered over with sacking, towards her house-door.

She backed away from the window. What did it mean?

There was a loud knocking at the door. With a hard face and a brusque manner she went to open it.

The man who had knocked stepped back when he saw her, looking greatly troubled. Another took his place.

"It was a pity you were not in when I came here before, Madame Beaumann," he said, "for I wanted to warn you that your husband was wandering bare-headed along the slippery path by the river."

"When did you come?" Leah asked, with dry lips, while the colour left her face.

"A couple of hours ago," replied the man. "I knocked and shouted at your door, but in vain. I could make nobody hear."

"I had gone to the church to pray," said Leah, uttering the falsehood glibly enough. "What has happened?"

The man pointed to the stretcher.

"We got him out of the water," he said. "Poor old professor! Doubtless he had slipped in."

"Yes; I've told him not to walk down there," Leah said, snappishly. "Bring him in."

The men stared at her, as they brought in the misshapen, sodden corpse, and laid it on the bed in an inner room.

"Poor old professor!" they said, as they did so.

But Leah made no remark. She was rather frightened when the authorities came to make notes and inquiries. But she repeated her falsehood glibly, and they appeared to believe her.

"It was a sad end to a long and honourable life," they said, "and we sympathise with you, Madame Beaumann."

"Thanks," she said, inclining her head.

They went out one by one. Only an old woman, who lived close by, and whose eyes and ears had discovered something of the truth, lingered.

"There's a man come to the town, Madame Beaumann," she said, "who is selling pardons—'indulgences' they call them."

"What of that?" Leah asked, looking sourly at the old woman.

"Why this—no matter how wicked one has been, God's forgiveness can be bought for money. Say you have committed a theft, you can go and buy a pardon for it, and the same with other sins: adultery, murder——"

"What is it to me?" Leah said. "Go. Leave me."

"Leave you?" cried the other, in offended tones. "Aye, I will! Trust me! You and I are very different people, Madame Beaumann!"

"Go! Go!" Leah pointed to the door.

"You will have plenty of money for the purpose, if you want to buy a pardon!" the old woman said. "Doubtless you are thinking of that!" And, with a withering look, she went away.

Leah stood horrified. For the first time she began to realise her sin.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SALE OF INDULGENCES

SOMETIME later Jonas Stiefel and Gretchen reached Wittenberg, and found that town in a state of no little excitement. People were streaming out of the town in crowds.

"Where are you all going?" asked Jonas of a stout man who was elbowing his way through the crowd, with a very thin woman hanging on to his arm.

"We are going to Juterbog," answered the man, "and you will come, too, if you are wise."

"Why?" asked Jonas, but the man merely beckoned to them to follow as he passed on.

"What is going on at Juterbog?" asked Jonas of a couple of young men, who were driven against him by the crowd.

"Don't you know?" one of them answered. "Is it possible you are so ignorant as not to know?"

"We are strangers," Jonas explained. "We have heard nothing."

"Then I will tell you," said the young man. "Merchants from Heaven—as indeed we must think them—have come to Juterbog, and are selling forgiveness of sins."

"What?" cried Jonas, in amazement.

"What do you mean?" echoed Gretchen.

"Sounds almost too good to be true, doesn't it?" said the young man, lingering, though his companion had gone on. "But it is so. No matter what the sin, if you bring money enough to these men they will forgive you."

"But how can they?" said Gretchen, raising blue eyes full of wonder to scan the other's face.

"I don't believe they can," muttered Jonas.

But the young man struck in eagerly, "Indeed they can! They come from His Holiness the Pope, and have brought letters written by him, promising free pardons for all sins, even the worst (with four exceptions), and a straight entrance into Heaven at death for the sinner. These are to be bought for money, and therefore we have gathered together our savings and are taking them to these men."

"Tut! tut!" exclaimed Jonas, frowning. "You had better keep your savings against bad times. It is the Lord Jesus Christ Who forgives sins, not the Pope and his emissaries."

The young man did not stay to make any rejoinder; he hurried on, pushing through the crowd before him.

Jonas stepped on one side to avoid the crush, and Gretchen followed him, his broad figure screening her from the pressure of the throng.

Scraps of talk from the passing people came to her ears, and the name "Tetzel" was frequently repeated. Some of the people spoke of their sins shamelessly. One was going to buy an indulgence for the sin of drunkenness, another for adultery, another for theft

And one youth declared he was good, and had done nothing wrong, but was going to buy forgiveness for any sin he might commit in the future.

"No one can forgive sins but the Lord Jesus and God the Father," Jonas exclaimed ever and anon, and when he said that, sometimes people looked angrily at him.

Gretchen pulled her uncle's sleeve.

"Never mind them," she said; "let us try to find Hannah. Perhaps while we are talking she is being grievously ill-treated."

"Yes, yes; you are right," Jonas answered, and forthwith began to inquire the way to the street where his daughter lived.

A woman told him how to get there. "But don't be surprised," she said, "if you find no one at home. I was told that the whole street was deserted——"

"Deserted! Why?" questioned Jonas.

"Can you ask?" the woman exclaimed. "Don't you see the men, women, and children flocking out of the town?"

"Yes."

"Well, they are going to Juterbog, to meet the man whom the Pope has sent here with his pardons, and buy the pardons from him." Having said this, the speaker hurried on.

"What stuff!" commented Jonas. "Come on, Gretchen, let us find my daughter's house."

Wittenberg not being such a very large town, they soon discovered the house to which, according to Madame Stiefel's account, Leah had gone as a bride.

But no one answered their repeated knocks at the door; it was evident that there was no one at home.

"Do you want Madame Beaumann?" asked a shrill voice from the first-floor window of a small house near.

The travellers bowed in assent, and Gretchen looked very eagerly at a quaint old woman who was speaking.

"Then I'll tell you where she has gone," said the

woman, in excited tones. "She has gone, like the rest, to Juterbog, to buy an indulgence for her great sin."

"What great sin do you mean, woman?" demanded Jonas.

The old woman screwed up her face and shook her head from side to side. She looked very forbidding.

"The man, Tetzal, who is going to sell pardons at Juterbog, has them for many different sins," she said. Then, slyly, with a sidelong look, she continued, "They say that eight ducats will buy one for murder."

"What do you mean by that?" Leah's father asked.

The old woman laughed shrilly, and shut the window with a bang.

Gretchen and her uncle looked at each other, then the former said as cheerfully as she could, "Don't think anything of what that horrible old woman says, uncle dear. We will go to Juterbog and find Leah."

"She may have altered very much. Long years have passed since we saw her."

"I am sure I should know her again," said Gretchen, "even if she is not so well dressed now."

They turned and, following the crowd, walked all the way to Juterbog, arriving there, tired and weary, about an hour before sunset.

The little town was full to overflowing, and there was a great and imposing procession making its way to the church. It seemed that Tetzal and his assistants travelled through the country in a fine carriage, accompanied by three mounted attendants—thus travelling in grand style and living at great expense. When they approached a town, a messenger was dispatched to the magistrate to say, "The Grace of God and of St. Peter is at your gates." Immediately the whole town was in motion. The clergy, priests, nuns, the council, schoolmasters and their scholars, the incorporations with their colours, men and women, old and young,

went out to meet Tetzel, with lighted tapers in their hands, amid the sound of music and the ringing of bells.

Eventually the whole body proceeded to the church, and Gretchen and her uncle arrived in time to see them.

The Bull of Grace, or Decree of the Pope, written on parchment, sealed and stamped with the likeness of St. Peter and St. Paul, was carried first, on a velvet cushion, or cloth of gold. Next came Tetzel, carrying a large wooden cross, painted red. He was followed by the whole procession, amid prayers, smoke of incense, and the singing of hymns.

The merchant-monk and his attendants were received at the church by the pealing organ and a burst of music. The cross was placed in front of the altar-table, and over it the Pope's arms were emblazoned.

The clergy and officials of the place came forward, with white wands in their hands, and bowed low before the cross.

Jonas and Gretchen were borne forwards by the crush of people into the church, where they found themselves in a corner near the door, tightly wedged in among the excited throng. Their eyes, like those of everyone else, were drawn to the central figure, the man, John Tetzel, who carried the red cross.

He wore the dress of a Dominican, and possessed an arrogant air. His voice was extremely loud and powerful, and, though sixty-three years of age, he seemed in full vigour. He was a most unscrupulous and wicked man, who was making an enormous amount of money over the business of selling indulgences.

After the cross was erected in the church and the arms of the Pope suspended over it, Tetzel mounted the pulpit and began to preach to the people about the virtues of the indulgences he had to sell.

To Gretchen and Jonas, listening by the door, his words seemed blasphemous. At first they were too far off to hear distinctly, but presently these words caught their ears :—

"Come, and I will give you letters under seal, by which even the sins which you may have a desire to commit in future, will all be forgiven you. . . .

"There is no sin too great for an indulgence to remit. . . .

Now, how many mortal sins are committed in one day, in one week? How many in a month, a year, a whole life? Now, by means of these letters of indulgence you can at once for life (in all cases except four) obtain a full remission of all your sins. . . ."

Then he proceeded to say, "Indulgences not only save the living, but also the dead," and he drew a lurid picture of the souls in torment, beseeching their living relatives to pay money in order that they might be delivered from their pain, declaring that they were crying out, "A little alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not!" And then, Tetzelsaid, in stentorian tones, "At the very instant when the piece of money chinks on the bottom of the strong box, the soul comes out of Purgatory, and, set free, flies up to Heaven. . . .

"Hard-hearted and thoughtless man, with twelve pence you can deliver your father out of Purgatory!" and so on, and on, until at last he shouted out:—

"Bring, bring, bring!"

Then, descending from the pulpit, he turned to the box in which offerings were to be placed, and threw a piece of money into it with such force as to make loud chinks.

Confessional boxes were then set up, and confessors appointed. And the crowd pressed forward to them, each one with money in his or her hand. Men, women, and children all came with money. The rich had to pay more, the poor less, each according to his means; and the different indulgences had different prices.

Gretchen's attention was attracted by an excited woman, who was trying to push her way past her.

"Let me come," she said in Gretchen's ear. "I've

got to pay eight ducats; it's for murder. The money will be well spent to be free from that sin—for I'm haunted, positively haunted by my victim!" *repeated*
Sick with horror, Gretchen recognised the voice.
"Leah!" she said. "Oh, Leah! Has it come to this?"

The woman shrank from her. "I didn't do any harm to you, Gretchen! At least not to speak of," she said. "Are you going to haunt me, too?"

"No, no. I'm living," Gretchen said, her warm hand grasping the woman's cold one. "And here is your father."

"Ay, my girl, I'm here," said Jonas, laying his hand on her shoulder.

Leah uttered a faint shriek, and tried to get away from them, but Jonas held her fast.

"Hush!" he said in her ear. "We've come here to seek you. Come out with us, and we will explain——"

"I cannot! Leave me! Let me go," Leah whispered, for now the people were looking angrily at them. "I must do what I've come to do," she said. "I've got the money, and I'm going to save my soul!" And, tearing herself away from them, she sped forward.

Later on, when they were free from the crowd and had succeeded in getting out of the church—a matter of no little difficulty on account of the throng—Leah came to them, looking radiant.

"It's all right now," she said, pressing her hand to her bosom, where lay the coveted document. "I have bought my pardon and the right to enter Heaven when I die."

She was *triumphant*. But her relations looked at her in pity, though they forbore just then to speak their minds.

"Leah, where is my Hannah?" Jonas asked, solemnly.

"Yes," Gretchen struck in. "Tell us quickly. Where is Hannah?"

CHAPTER XVI

HANNAH'S EXTREMITY

"WILL no one come?" cried a poor servant girl, wringing her hands. "Oh, Heaven, have mercy, have mercy upon me!" She was faint and ill, having been imprisoned in an outbuilding for many hours. "Have mercy! Have mercy, St. Elizabeth! Oh, Mary, the Blessed Virgin, save me!" she repeated from time to time.

"They have gone—my cruel mistress and master—to buy indulgences for themselves, but I, who wanted most of all to know my sins forgiven, they have locked up until they return! And they have taken my money—the money which I was two years in saving up—they have taken it from me, so that I cannot buy a pardon, even if I could get free from this place!" thought she painfully. "Oh, Gretchen! Oh, my father! Where are you? Why do you never come to your poor Hannah?"

By and bye she heard her master and mistress drive off, and since then no one had been near her. The house with its few outbuildings was in a lonely part of the country, on the edge of the forest, and few people passed that way. Juterbog was twelve miles away, and she thought it quite likely that her master and mistress might not return that night. And now, to add to her terror, she distinctly heard wolves howling in the distance. If they came to the solitary house there would be no one to drive them away. It was not likely that they could get into the place where she was locked up, yet, if they surrounded it, that alone would terrify her horribly.

Nearer and nearer, as the darkness increased, came the howling and baying of the wolves. Presently there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder.

Hannah fell upon her knees, frantically beseeching the Saints and the Virgin Mary to protect her. She

felt hopeless. They would not help ! Always it seemed as if they would not hear. Then an idea occurred to her, and, becoming bold in her desperation, she cried out, " O Holy Jesus, Thou Whose footsteps I have tried to follow, save me ! "

At first it seemed as if there were no answer, though she felt a ray of hope stealing across her mind. A vivid flash of lightning lit up the place in which she was confined. It showed her an opening in one wall, which was merely blocked by a piece of wood. If she removed the wood she might get out to freedom, or, alas ! more probably be eaten by the wolves ; and it was possible that they might tear away the wood and enter.

The terror of that thought was too great ; it was more than she could bear ; and, with a low cry, she fell to the ground in a swoon.

Outside, the storm raged and the wolves howled, but Hannah, stretched upon the floor, was at rest, for the time being, from all her fears.

When she came to herself, the morning light was entering the outhouse through the opening overhead.

The storm was over. There was no more howling of wolves. In the daylight they dared not approach human habitations. It was only in the night that they were bold, unless indeed they were driven by exceptional hunger.

" God must have heard my prayer," thought Hannah, " for He has taken care of me, and brought me safely through the night." And she knelt down reverently to thank Him, and arose with the resolve in her mind that she would always pray directly to Him in future, instead of to the Saints and to the Virgin Mary.

Then she turned to the log filling the hole in the wall, and she could not have detected the difference in the dim light in the outhouse had it not been the lightning which revealed it to her. To remove it was easy, and she found, to her joy, that she could just pass through the opening.

She stepped into the fresh morning light, little knowing what was in store for her, and what a red-letter day that would be in her life.

CHAPTER XV

THE FINDING OF HANNAH

HANNAH'S first thought was that she was free, and that she would escape from her cruel master and mistress while it was in her power to do so. She therefore started to cross the yard, but a sudden attack of giddiness made her pause and remember that she had eaten nothing for nearly twenty-four hours.

It was, therefore, necessary to go into the house and get some food, and she essayed to do so. But the doors into the dwelling were locked, and the windows were fastened, and so it was a matter of no small difficulty to get into the house.

Hannah sat down on a step to consider how she was to get about it, and her eyes fell on an empty cask, and then on the small window of her own little bedroom. It was the only window that was open, and she saw that if she could place the cask below it and climb upon that, she might be able to get through. Accordingly she got up to make the attempt.

In her weak state of health it took her some time to push and roll the empty cask under the window, and when it was at length in position it was too high for her to climb upon it.

She was alone, and the house was empty, as her master and mistress had not yet returned. Jock, the horse, was not in the stable—she had taken the precaution of looking in as she passed it—therefore she was certain they had not returned.

At last, she fell upon her knees to pray for help and

strength ; and again she took courage to pray to God, instead of to the Saints or the Virgin Mary.

As she rose from her knees her eyes fell on a big stone at the other side of the yard, and the thought that by means of it she might be able to step on the cask, was a welcome one.

The stone when she reached it proved to be very heavy, and she was weak and faint. But slowly, very slowly, inch by inch, she dragged the heavy stone across the yard to the cask. Then she used it as a stepping-stone, and when upon the cask, she found that she was able to climb in at her bedroom window.

Having gained an entrance into the house she sought for food, and happily found both meat and bread. These she partook of sparingly, with a drink of cold water.

Feeling refreshed, she returned to her bedroom, and began to collect together her few possessions in the way of scanty clothing and one or two little gifts which had been bestowed upon her in times past. Making all these into a bundle and tying it up, she was about to leave her little room—as she thought, for the last time—when, to her terror, she heard the sound of voices and of a horse's hoofs.

"They have come back ! What shall I do ? Where shall I hide ? They will be fit to kill me, when they find I have escaped from my prison !" thought the terror-stricken girl. "Oh, God help me !" she cried again and again, appealing to the Deity without making use of those whom the teaching of her Church made a barrier between man and God. "Help me ! Help me to escape from them !"

She was so deeply engaged in praying thus that she did not for some time realise that the new comers, whoever they might be, were knocking loudly at the door—which her employers would not be at all likely to do, as they had taken the key with them. Peeping out of the window, she looked to see who was at the door.

It was not her master, but a bearded man, whose aspect seemed strangely familiar, and by his side, holding the bridle of a horse, which evidently both had been riding, was a slender little woman whose face she could not see.

Overjoyed that it was not her master and mistress, Hannah called out:—

“What do you want, sir?”

The little woman seemed to be saying something eagerly to the man, but he did not heed her.

“Tell me,” he said, very earnestly, to Hannah, “does one named Hannah Stiefel live in this house?”

“*Father!*” cried Hannah, recognising him as he spoke. “*Father!*”

“Why, little Hannah, is it *you*?” he cried.

“I knew it the moment she spoke,” cried Gretchen.

“Hannah! *Hannah!* Don’t you know me?”

“*Gretchen!*” Hannah cried delightedly. “Thanks be to God!”

“Come down, child. Come down to us,” said Jonas, impatient to embrace her.

“Wait a moment,” Hannah cried, and then ran down to the parlour window which was near the door.

Opening the window, she leaned out, saying, “I cannot open the door, but I want to kiss you, my father.”

They helped her to get through the window, and then Jonas embraced her again and again, as did Gretchen; and, after kissing her tenderly, they observed how very thin and bent was her poor figure, evidently from the hard work and ill-usage she had received.

“You have been through a very hard time, my poor Hannah,” said her father.

“Yes, indeed I have; but no matter, father, now you have come.”

“You must come away with us, dear,” said Gretchen.

“We have come to take you home.”

“Thank God!” said Hannah again. “Do you

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see this bundle?" She had left it on the window-sill and secured it as she spoke. "I had just packed it up in order that I might leave this place for ever."

"Why?" asked her father.

Hannah told them briefly, yet in graphic, forceful words, exactly what had happened during the past twenty-four hours, and they listened in great indignation.

"I should like that master and mistress of yours to come home while I am here," said Jonas. "I would soon tell them what I think of them, ay, and punish them, too."

"They are monsters!" Gretchen said.

Hannah was crying softly. The recital of her wrongs and all that she had been through had reopened her wounds, and the tears would flow.

"The worst of all," she sobbed, "the worst of all was when they took my money, with which I was going to buy forgiveness of all my sins and an easy entrance into Heaven when I die. Oh, they might have killed me, but they need not have destroyed my soul!"

"They have not done that," Jonas said. "As Gretchen here will tell you also, forgiveness of sins and the right to enter Heaven *cannot be sold for money*, but are *given freely* by our Lord and Saviour to all who call upon Him in sincerity and truth."

"But the indulgences?" questioned Hannah, sorely mystified. "What do they mean?"

It was Gretchen who answered her. "I'm afraid, dear, they are an imposture. . . . I mean they are not ordained of God, but are substituted by the wickedness of men."

"Do you say they are of no use then?" Hannah asked.

"We don't believe in them a bit," Gretchen answered. "But don't you trouble about that, dear Hannah, for

they are not needed. God Himself is ready and willing to forgive our sins for His Son's sake."

"Yes, yes. Believe that, my child," Jonas said to Hannah, "and you will be all right."

"It seems too good to be true," said Hannah. "But I will try to believe it, as you say it is so."

Jonas then declared that they must set off on their return to Wittenberg, where he and Gretchen had left their luggage.

He assisted both Gretchen and Hannah to mount the horse, and he himself walked by its head, with his hand on the bridle.

"I am well content to walk," he said, "as I have found my little Hannah."

She wept for joy upon hearing that. It was long since she believed herself to be so loved.

So they went on to Wittenberg, where a surprise awaited them.

CHAPTER XVI

LUTHER AND THE INDULGENCES

AT Wittenberg they were detained some time owing to the serious illness of Hannah, who fell into a low nervous fever, and lay ill for weeks. Sometimes she was delirious, and then it was pitiful to hear the revelations of cruelty endured by her, which she made in her rambling.

"Don't beat me! Don't!" she would cry at times. And again, "Please let me have something to eat! I have worked so hard, and have eaten nothing to-day! Oh, do let me have food! I am so hungry!" When food was offered to her she ate it ravenously, in a manner which brought tears to Gretchen's eyes.

"Poor dear Hannah! They have been cruel to you! Don't think about them now. Listen! I will sing you to sleep," Gretchen would say, beginning

to chant a Psalm in a low voice, and generally fixing upon the one that Martin Luther loved :—

A sure stronghold our God is He,
A timely shield and weapon ;
Our help He'll be, and set us free
From every ill can happen.

Gretchen, who could not sing at all in the old days, had learnt from Luke to chant quite nicely.

One day she received a letter from him. It ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR GRETCHEN,—I am hoping that you are successful in your search for Hannah. Commend me to her, and say that I have never ceased to love her, and to pray that she may be protected and blessed. Since you have left us I have prayed much for you and my dear father. In staying behind I have to bear and endure a great deal, but loyalty to my poor mother forbids me to say more. The drink fiend is a terrible one, and his victims are the greatest slaves on earth. Down, down he drags them, inch by inch, until they are in the lowest depths, ready for murder, suicide, and villainy of every description. The drink fiend begins by taking away the self-control of his victim, then the will and every atom of right feeling. After that, he can make of him or her what he will. It is a hideous state of things.

“Sometimes my life is not safe. For my mother looks at me merely as an obstacle in her path, and hates me proportionately, and I cannot be awake at all hours. Sooner or later I must sleep, and that is the time of danger.

“I do not want to die. For, though I believe in the mercy of God, and can trust myself in His hands, I love you, my Gretchen, and still dare to look forward to the time when you will soften towards me, and turn to the love which has waited for you for many years.

“I hear that Tetzl, the merchant-monk, is in your

neighbourhood, selling his so-called indulgences, and that the soul of Martin Luther is filled with righteous anger, because the poor are being lured by Tetzl to give up all their hardly-earned savings; and he, who has known what it is to toil for a pittance, would fain avenge them. Mark me, there will be great doings when the lion-hearted man begins to move.

"Love to my father and to you, my Gretchen,

"Thine,

"LUKE STIEFEL."

"Poor Luke!" thought Gretchen, when she had read this letter. "Aunt must be very bad. God grant that he may be saved from injury by her hands! God bless him for the love he gives to me so generously! Would that I could return it!"

But even as she said this to herself her thoughts were flying to the "lion-hearted man" who Luke thought was about to move against the merchant-monk, and who pretended to traffic in souls and the things pertaining to eternity; and she found herself wondering when he would begin.

She was soon to know. For, that afternoon, when she went out for a breath of fresh air and a little exercise while her uncle sat with poor Hannah, she found a great concourse of people gathered together in the streets. They all seemed greatly excited, and many of them were talking angrily.

It seemed that Dr. Martin Luther had been preaching against the indulgences, and telling the people plainly that forgiveness was freely given to the penitent by God Himself, and was not to be purchased at any price, least of all with money. He said the Holy Scriptures did not demand of us any penalty or satisfaction for our sins. They told that God gives freely and without price, out of His infinite mercy, and requires of the forgiven only true repentance and the love which shows itself in doing His Will.

In return Tetzel and his assistants had cursed Dr. Luther from the pulpit in front of the iron money chest in which they received money; and at Juterbog, men said they had seen a great heap of burning faggots, which Tetzel had kindled in the market-place, he said, "to burn the heretics." And then, on the first morning of the festival, when people went to church to early mass, they discovered some writings by Dr. Luther, called Theses, nailed to the church door, and on the pillars near the door. They were writings against the indulgences, and contained words very similar to those he used in his great sermon; but, being written down and put up thus publicly, they then had far more effect. They were written in Latin, but, every now and then, a student translated them to the people crowding round.

Gretchen went up to the church to see the Theses. There were a great many of them, and they had been nailed to the door and pasted to the columns by Luther himself. As she stood looking at the writings, and watching the sea of excited and anxious faces upturned to them on every side, she heard a student translating:—

"**THESIS 37.** Every true Christian, dead or alive, participates in all the blessings of Christ and of the Church, by the gift of God and without a letter of indulgence."

A roar of voices interrupted the student's self-imposed task. "We have been robbed! We have been robbed of our money, and have been given documents of no value!" men cried. And the feeling against Tetzel became very keen and hot.

"If men cheat us of our bodily health," cried one aloud, "it is a crime. But what of one who cheats us of our spiritual health and welfare? Is he not doubly guilty? Yes. Yes, indeed!"

Gretchen made her way back to her lodgings, as best she could for the crowd, and she felt then—which, indeed, was the truth—that Dr. Martin Luther had

commenced a great Reformation, which would affect the whole Christian world. When she got back a surprise awaited her. Luke Stiefel was standing in the doorway.

"*Luke!*" Gretchen exclaimed.

"Brother Luke?" said Hannah, questioningly, when they went in. "Oh, I didn't know him till you spoke! I didn't remember him! Is it really Luke?"

"Yes, I am Luke," he said, smiling and coming forward to kiss her brow.

"How is it you are here, Luke?" asked Gretchen. "With whom have you left your mother? Or perhaps you have brought her?" she questioned.

"Mother is dead," Luke answered, very gravely, "and I am injured for life."

"In what way?" Gretchen asked, with great anxiety.

"I am almost blind," was the reply, "and I greatly fear that the injury done to my eyes will lead to total blindness."

"Oh! God forbid!" ejaculated Gretchen and Hannah simultaneously.

"How did it happen?"

"I will tell you," he said. "I will tell you everything."

CHAPTER XVII

LUKE'S HEROISM

JONAS STIEFEL entered the room just as Luke was going to tell his sad news. He had already seen Luke, and his eyes were red as if he had been weeping.

"Go on, Luke," he said, "I want to hear it all again, and more fully than you have already told me. It's miserable hearing, but I'd better know the truth."

"Will it upset Hannah, who is still very weak?" Gretchen asked of Luke, in her usual thoughtful way.

But Hannah struck in, "Don't hide anything from me, please. Let me hear *everything*."

"It's nice to hear Hannah's voice," Luke said. "I cannot make out her face in this bad light, but the voice is the voice of our little Hannah."

"She has been through such a lot," said Jonas. "They almost killed the poor child."

"I shall be all right now, you'll see," said Hannah. "I'm just longing to be well again and live happily with you all."

Then Luke began to unfold his news.

"You must know, Gretchen," he said, "that after you and father had gone, it was very dull and quiet at home. I sat with mother a good deal, but there were times when I had to leave her to attend to my business. I always found reason to regret it when I did so leave her; but, unfortunately, I became extra busy, and was often detained in my office for hours at a time. One evening, when I had been thus detained until nearly midnight, I hurried homewards, and met messengers coming to tell me that our house was on fire. I hastened on and found it was only too true, the whole house was wrapped in smoke and flames. No one knew how the fire originated, but men were working hard to subdue the flames. My first inquiry was for my mother. I was informed that she had gone to the house of a friend, and I hurried off there to see if she was all right. But when I reached the friend's house it was in darkness: the whole family were in bed, and knew nothing about my mother.

"I hastened back home, to find her standing at a window on the top floor of the house; she was shrieking and calling for help. So, getting a ladder with all speed from the other side of the house, I climbed up it. Alas! My mother was beside herself with fright and drink. Thinking I was an enemy that had come to harm her, she fought me and endeavoured to push me down the ladder. She was desperately strong, and several minutes

passed in futile endeavours, before I was able to tie her hands and get my arms round her to carry her down. By that time the roof was beginning to fall in, and some burning wood falling across my face almost blinded me. The pain in my eyes was fearful, but I managed to get down the ladder with poor mother. Then I knew no more. When I came to myself I was in bed in a neighbour's house, and my eyes were bandaged so that I could not see. Upon asking after my mother they told me she was dead. The shock and the pain from her burns had carried her off, but not before she confessed that it was she who set fire to the house, not knowing what she did. Forgive me for saying all this, father," and Luke turned to his parent.

"Eh, my son," answered the elder man, "we wished to know the truth, and you have given it to us. I only wish——"

"What?"

"That I could buy a really efficacious indulgence which would secure for your poor mother forgiveness and an entrance into Heaven! I would give half the money I possess if I could do it."

"Would you go to Father Tetzl?" asked Hannah, wonderingly.

"No, my child. For that would be no use. I have no faith in his documents." The man sighed deeply.

Later on, he decided not to return to Erfurt, but to send for such things as had been saved from the wreck of his house, and live upon his means—which were not inconsiderable—at Wittenberg. Gretchen and Hannah were to live with him, he said, and then the question was, what should Luke do? He was so nearly blind that it would be difficult for him to continue in business, and yet he was not well enough off to continue to live without working.

"Gretchen," Luke said to her, when at last she was to be found alone, "it is just as well you did not promise to marry me, for it would indeed have been a

hard lot for you to be bound to a man who is nearly blind, and will probably become quite so. I hope, dearest, you will one day marry happily, and that your life will be all that you could wish, and that you may continue to be a blessing to all with whom you have to do."

"Is that all you have to say to me now?" said Gretchen, questioningly.

"Yes, all," Luke answered, and went away, wondering what further speech she had expected of him.

CHAPTER XVIII

GRETCHEN'S LOVE

JONAS STIEFEL took a house at Wittenberg, and settled down there with his beloved niece, Gretchen, and precious daughter, Hannah.

So the little family at Wittenberg lived quietly together in peace and contentment, excepting when their anxiety about poor Luke returned to trouble them. Yet, not even for his sake, would Jonas return to Erfurt, where his wife had disgraced his name and brought contempt upon his family.

Believing, as they did, in most of the doctrines Dr. Martin Luther taught, Jonas and Hannah, as well as Gretchen, were deeply interested in the great fight he was now making for the Truth. His bold action in publicly opposing Tetzel, by preaching against him and fixing up the Theses upon the door and pillars of this Castle-church, and leaving them there in the sight of all people, had caused an immense sensation all over Germany, and even so far as Rome.

Tetzel, seeing his frauds exposed and his occupation in danger, determined upon a bold counter-move. On a public walk in one of the suburbs of Frankfort he caused a scaffold and a pulpit to be erected. From the

pulpit he preached furiously against Martin Luther, declaring that he ought to be burnt alive. On the scaffold he placed copies of Martin Luther's Theses and sermons, and then burnt them up. He then proceeded to write theses of his own against Luther, which he sent into Saxony, and as far as Wittenberg, with the idea that they would be a sort of antidote to those of Luther.

The students of Wittenberg University, indignant with Tetzal for having burned their master's Theses, seized as many of Tetzal's documents as they could get hold of, and publicly burned them in the market-place.

Jonas took Hannah and Gretchen to see the bonfire, and they observed with sympathy the feeling of love to Luther that animated the young men, although deploring their desire to retaliate and pay Tetzal back in his own coin.

"By doing that they placed themselves on his level," Jonas said.

"But how they love Dr. Martin Luther!" Hannah remarked. "Oh," she cried, "love is the most beautiful thing in all the world! How I have hungered for it!" she added, in a low tone.

"Well, my Hannah, you have plenty of it now," her father said, adding, "Poor child! What a time you have had!"

The next day Gretchen received a packet and a letter from Luther. She opened the letter from Luther first, and read it eagerly. It was short and to the point—

"DEAR GRETCHEN,—I am sending you a copy of part of the Bible, which I have translated into our tongue, and which is being printed as fast as I can do it. This Gospel which I send you is very precious to me.

"News has reached me of the burning of Tetzal's documents by the students of my University. I deplore this much, and am exceedingly annoyed, especially as

the doing of it is attributed to me, who knew nothing about it. I feel confident that this will stir up strife.

"Your friend,

"MARTIN LUTHER."

Gretchen read the Gospel he had sent her with great delight. She had never heard more than fragments of it read aloud in church, before she received Luther's present; and very beautiful to her mind was the whole of the history of the Lord Jesus Christ. Often she read her Gospel aloud to Hannah and Jonas, and the three thought much of the words of Christ contained in it, and treasured them in their hearts. This was indeed an excellent thing to do, as our Lord has said, "If a man love Me he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him."

The Reformation had now commenced in earnest. All this writing of Theses and burning of them deepened and widened the dispute and the rent in the church. The Pope and the bishops declared themselves against the Reformer. The Bishop of Brandenburg said, "I will not lay down my head in peace until I have thrown Martin into the fire, as I do this brand," throwing one into the grate.

But Luther went on writing and preaching and translating the Scriptures.

At last, on June 15, 1520, the Pope, alarmed at the state of ferment into which the country had been plunged through Luther's writings and preachings, issued a Bull (*i.e.*, an edict of the Pope which has his seal attached) in which he condemned Luther as a heretic and excommunicated him.

When, in due course, Luther saw the Bull and noted that part of the punishment meted out to him was that all his works and writings should be burnt, he determined to personally burn the Bull itself in some public place.

Gretchen received a message from him, bidding her come with her uncle and cousin to the East Gate of Wittenberg near the Sacred Cross, and on their drawing near the spot, they found an enormous bonfire was made, and a crowd of students were gathered round it.

They were just in time to see Luther, in his monk's dress, step forward and put into the fire, one by one, the books of papal law and finally the Bull itself.

Having done the work, he walked quietly away, after signing to Gretchen and her friends not to follow him.

This great public act of opposition to Rome and defiance of its authority, caused the Pope to request the Emperor, Charles V., to assist him to put down heresy in Germany. In consequence of this, Luther was summoned to appear before Charles at the Diet of Worms.

Luther's great friend, Melancthon, a young professor of ancient languages at the University of Wittenberg, himself brought the news to Gretchen.

"Luther bids me tell you," said he, "that he has been summoned to appear before the Diet (the chief National Council of princes and delegates) at Worms."

"But will there not be danger?" asked the woman who loved him.

"Grave danger. You know what befell Huss when he was summoned before the Council of Constance?"

"Yes. He was condemned to be burned at the stake!" Gretchen replied, in shocked tones.

"Even so, and it may be the same with our dear Dr. Luther," was the grave response.

"Then do not suffer him to go," said Gretchen.

"None can hinder him," Melancthon answered.

"He says this, 'If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the houses I would go.'"

Gretchen's eyes shone.

"He is right," she said, proudly. "He is a man.

Do not hinder him. But let us pray to God that he may have power to prevail over the princes and delegates, so that they shall not hurt him, and I will get my cousin Hannah to pray also—for her prayers have been often answered, and we are told by our Lord to ask and we shall receive."

"Am I to tell Luther that?" asked the young man.

"Yes. Tell him that all the time he is there, we, who love our Lord, will be praying for him," was Gretchen's reply.

After that there was nothing for them to do in the matter except to pray, and they prayed for Luther without ceasing.

Later on, they heard that, when Luther stood before the great assembly, and was asked whether he would recant, his answer was:—

"Unless I have proof from Holy Scripture, I neither can nor will retract anything; for a Christian cannot be doing right to go against his conscience."

The Emperor was impressed by his boldness.

"The monk speaks with an intrepid heart and unshaken courage," he said.

Upon Luther's being asked again if he would retract what he had taught, he uttered the memorable saying:—

"Here stand I. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

There was a solemn hush over the assembly, while all gazed upon the man who stood there—one against thousands.

And the women away in Wittenberg prayed for his safety.

The Emperor gave him three days in which to reconsider the matter, whilst theologians and learned men tried their best to shake him with arguments and advice. But in vain. Luther stood firm.

The immediate result was that the edict of the Diet was published, condemning Martin Luther and

placing him under the ban of Empire, which meant that he would be an outlaw, and that anyone giving him food or shelter would be severely punished.

Then Luther disappeared. His friends at Wittenberg lost him, and his enemies lost him completely.

It was thought by many that the papal party had employed men to assassinate him, or that he was incarcerated in some noisome dungeon.

Gretchen wept pitifully, fearing that her prayers had been offered in vain, and that the dear friend of her childhood and womanhood had been put to death.

But Hannah said:—

“Do not weep, dear Gretchen. I believe our prayers have been heard, for we prayed straight to God, asking Him, for the sake of His dear Son, to save Dr. Luther.”

Then, just at that time when Gretchen's heart was wrung because of the loss of Luther, she received this message from Luke by the hand of a trusty messenger:—

“I am in darkness and despair, for I have lost my faith in man and God. I am blind, quite blind, and the outer darkness is as nothing to the darkness of my soul. There is only one thing that can help me now. Only one thing, and it rests in your hands—in the hands of *Gretchen*.”

“Luke Stiefel wept as he said it,” the messenger added, with a mistiness in his own eyes at the recollection, “and he wrung his hands. ‘I am unmanly,’ he said, ‘to appeal to her so, but God knows I am desperate. He has placed me apart from all others in the darkness, with just one ray of hope in my heart, that whispers of *Gretchen*.’”

“Wait,” said Gretchen, in trembling tones. “Wait a short time.” And, hurriedly leaving the messenger, she went up to her chamber, and, throwing herself upon her knees, prayed, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

Before her eyes, as she knelt, passed scenes from her childhood and youth. Once more she was a child, hiding herself behind the projecting corner of a house, weeping and wincing with pain as she heard the sound of blows falling upon her playmate, Martin.

Again, she sat by her brother John's side on a fallen tree, as he told them about John Huss being burned to death for his faith, and crying out with his dying breath, "I give my soul to God and to my Saviour Jesus Christ."

And again, she was in Erfurt, a little drudge toiling in her aunt's house as a servant without a wage, treasuring in her bosom John's letter containing the words, "Martin says it will be fine to have little Gretchen to welcome us when we come," and going on to tell her of the shining footsteps of Jesus, her King, in which she was to follow Him.

Well, she had followed in them in the best way she could, and Martin had come with John to Erfurt. She had met them in the street, walking with staves in their hands. Oh! the joy of that meeting! But afterwards there was a disappointment, for Martin cared not especially for her. And Luke loved her and wanted to make her his wife.

Then she thought of the Plague, and of nursing her uncle, but Martin came not near, at least to stay, and it was Luke who risked his life to save hers.

At the time Martin was ill certainly, and afterwards he was her friend, but he had taken the vow of celibacy and become a monk. And Luke had loved her persistently, although lately he had endeavoured to conceal the fact.

Martin was a great hero and reformer. He had done immense work for God and for his fellow creatures; and for doing it he had suffered persecution and probably death. His would be the victor's crown.

But Luke loved her. He also had been brave—risking his life for that of his wretched mother; and

he, also, suffered for his bravery a penalty which to him was worse than death.

Now he was in despair. He loved her still, and had sent to tell her of his blindness and misery. Simply to tell her that was all. He would not beseech her to come to his help. He only told her—Gretchen. She knew that her name was to him synonymous with all that was good and kind and pitiful. Should she disprove it? Should she leave him in darkness and despair?

Her own life had not given her what she wanted in regard to earthly love, but God had bestowed on her sweet thoughts of Himself. The Lord Jesus, Whose footsteps she had tried to follow from early girlhood, was her ever-present Guide and Exemplar. She was not in darkness, for she walked in the light.

But Luke was out in the cold and darkness. And Luke loved her.

As she knelt there, thinking of his long and manly love for her, and the sweetness and unselfishness and nobility of his disposition and character, together with his present woeful plight, a feeling akin to love awoke within her breast, and she whispered tenderly:—

"God helping me, I will go to him."

Rising from her knees she went downstairs to her uncle, and stood before him with clasped hands.

"My dear uncle," she said, "the time has come for me to leave you. I am going to Luke—to marry him."

Jonas sprang up and wrung her hand.

"God bless you, my Gretchen!" he said. "This is the dearest wish of my heart; though I shall miss you very much. The thought of Luke's loneliness has been ever in my mind."

"He is *totally* blind now," said Gretchen.

"Then he needs you the more. But, dear Gretchen, are you only going to marry him from pity?" asked Jonas regretfully.

"I shall marry him because I love him," answered Gretchen, with shining eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

GRETCHEN'S MARRIED LIFE

"LUKE, I have come; I have come." The blind man started and raised his head. He was sitting just inside the door of the little house he rented, in order to feel the sunshine; and a neighbour's child was playing with tin soldiers on the doorstep, occasionally lifting one or other of Luke's feet to make a house, or tent, for his tiny warriors; Luke was enduring the indignity of being moved as the child desired, for the sake of companionship.

"*Gretchen!*" the blind man cried. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, really and truly, Luke."

"But you have only come to see me," he said, wearily. "You are going away again. Your coming will only make the afterwards more painful," his tones were again despairing.

"I shall never go away unless you send me," Gretchen returned. "Luke, *I have come to stay.*"

"Father, I cannot see her face to read it. You must tell me, is it true?"

"Yes, my son. Gretchen will marry you," Jonas made answer hastily. Then, picking up the child, he carried him away to the cottage where he lived.

When he returned, half an hour later, Gretchen and Luke were indoors, sitting hand in hand, and talking happily of the future. Luke was like another man, the deathly pallor of his face, which had been noticeable when they came, had gone, and a healthy pink had stolen into his cheeks. He could lift his head now and play the man. Gretchen had convinced him of her love; she needed no assurance of his.

"Father, where have you hidden yourself?" Luke cried quite gaily. "Come and congratulate me. I'm the richest man in Erfurt, for I'm going to marry a woman whose value is beyond rubies!"

"She is that, indeed, my son," said Jonas. "A better woman than Gretchen never lived! She saved my life, as you know; and ever since she has been the sunshine of my home and the tenderest sister to poor Hannah."

"And she will be the very best wife in the world to me!" Luke cried, caressing her hands softly with his own.

"I don't know how I can spare her," Jonas said, presently.

"Your loss will be my gain," his son declared.

"I do not like to leave you, uncle," Gretchen declared. "Couldn't you and Hannah live here, too?"

"Ah, we must think about it," Jonas said. But later he told them he had formed friendships at Wittenberg, and liked the place and preferred to stay there, but why could not Luke and Gretchen come and live there, too?" he asked.

Luke said he would have no objection to removing his business to Wittenberg, if Gretchen would assist him. He was a cloth merchant, and had only done badly since he lost his sight.

"But now Gretchen will help me with her eyes," he said, "and together we may do well."

As soon as possible the two were married, and then Jonas assisted them to remove to Wittenberg, and settle down there in a small house not very far from his own.

Hannah was delighted to have them so near, and helped them to get settled with willing hands. To her mind it was very beautiful to see Gretchen's devotion to Luke, and the way in which she tried to anticipate his every wish.

In the daytime husband and wife applied themselves to business, and in the evenings, it was Gretchen's delight to take Luke out into the fresh air, or if it were wet weather, to read to him out of her beloved Gospel.

Of Martin Luther they heard nothing during the first months of their married life, then the news leaked out—no one knew exactly how—that he had been taken prisoner, from motives of kindness, by his powerful friend, the Elector of Saxony, who sent disguised men to seize him and carry him off to the Castle of Wartburg. There he was detained for his own safety, and went out only occasionally in the forest, disguised in the dress of a knight ; indeed, he bore the cognomen of Sir George, so that those about him might not suspect that he was the Reformer, Martin Luther. At the Wartburg he was kept, for his own security, a long time, and there he worked at his chosen task of translating the Holy Scriptures into German, in order that his fellow countrymen might read them for themselves. He was anxious that his translation should be in such simple language as to be understood by all : the mother in the house, the children in the streets, and the man in the market.

It was a red-letter day for Gretchen and her husband when the whole of Luther's New Testament was published, on September 22, 1522. As speedily as possible they procured a copy of it, and then, together, they enjoyed its perusal—Gretchen reading and Luke listening and making comments.

CHAPTER XX

GRETCHEN'S HEROIC DEEDS

THESE days of peacefulness were succeeded by a terrible time, caused by the insurrection of the peasants of Germany, which, commencing in the Black Forest, threatened to overrun the whole kingdom. These men, led by fanatics who claimed to be prophets, and tried to set up their ideas of religion and equality, were the cause of the most shameful rioting and worse. The country was convulsed with civil warfare—the peasants against the nobles, and the nobles against the peasants. Many lives were lost; disorder, misery, and death stalked through the land.

Luther would no longer remain concealed in the Wartburg: the nobles blamed him for setting the land aflame against the Church and against all order and discipline; and Luther determined to do his utmost to make peace. Writing to his friend, the Elector, he said that he was leaving the Wartburg, and that he was doing so on his own responsibility. He asked for no protection, no help, and in his letter to the Elector said, boldly:—

“Do nothing. As for myself, let the command of the Emperor be executed in town or country. Do not resist if they come to seize and kill me; only let the doors remain open for the word of God.”

Then, although he knew that the most violent enemy of the Reformation, Duke George of Saxony, was waiting to execute the sentence of the ban upon him, Luther returned to Wittenberg, where he threw himself with zeal between the two factions, bidding the peasants obey lawful authority and keep all laws, human and divine. He represented to them that a great part of their demands was doubtless well founded, but that to revolt was to act like pagans; that Christians ought to be patient, and that if they continued to rise in the name of the Gospel, against the Gospel itself, he

would regard them as more dangerous enemies than the Pope himself.

"The Pope and the Emperor," continued he, "have united against me; but the more the Pope and the Emperor have stormed, the greater the progress the Gospel has made. . . . Why so? Because I have never drawn the sword, nor called for vengeance—because I have not had recourse either to tumult or revolt: I have committed all to God, and awaited His strong hand. It is neither with the sword nor the musket that Christians fight, but with suffering and the Cross. Christ, their Captain, did not handle the sword; He hung upon the tree."

To the princes and bishops he spoke with boldness, saying, "You are the cause of the revolt. Your invectives against the Gospel, your culpable oppression of the little ones of the Church, have brought the people to despair. It is not the peasants, dear lords, who rise up against you: it is God Himself Who wishes to oppose your fury. The peasants are only the instruments whom He is employing to humble you. Think not to escape the punishment which He is preparing for you. . . . Dear lords, for the love of God, lay aside your indignation. Suppress these commotions by gentleness, lest a conflagration break forth and set all Germany in a blaze."

But in vain did Luther plead in this Christian manner. The people would not listen. "He is playing the hypocrite," they said. "He is flattering the princes. He waged war with the Pope, and yet would have us submit."

Then the strife raged furiously. Neither gentleness nor force could arrest it. It was no longer for Divine Service that the church bell sounded. Whenever the church bells rang all rushed to arms.

On the approach of the peasants the towns opened their gates and joined them. Wherever they entered pictures were torn, and crucifixes broken to pieces.

Nobles, some from fear and others from ambition, joined the revolvers.

When things were at their worst, Luther came in to see Gretchen one evening. He was enveloped in a cloak and his hat was pulled over his eyes, for danger threatened him on all sides should he be recognised.

"Dear friend," he said to Gretchen, holding her hand and looking down into her true eyes, "I need your prayers, for I am in great trouble. The friends of Rome are triumphing. All are against me. Men think it would be doing God a service to kill me."

"Our Lord is permitting you to be tried thus," Gretchen said, "that you may be baptised with the baptism that He was baptised with. He is giving you this heavy cross to bear, in order that you may follow in His footsteps."

"Ah, Gretchen," Martin said, "your persistent mention of those footsteps has often helped me to remember them!"

"And you sent me the verse about them in the first instance," Gretchen said, "through my dear brother John."

"Dear old John!" said the Reformer. "Do you remember his telling us about John Huss, that day in the forest when we were children?"

"Yes, yes. Ah, it was a grand thing to die for God like Huss!" Gretchen exclaimed.

"As, perchance, I shall."

"God forbid!" cried Gretchen. "No, Martin; methinks He wants you to live for Him and not to die."

"Danger threatens me on all sides," said Luther. "I am under the ban, you know, which makes out that it is the duty of any son of the Church to molest me. The bishops and nobility are doubly incensed with me, because of this rising of the peasants, for they say that it is the result of my teaching, and that if I had not taught them to think for themselves, and to see the injustice of the tyranny of the Church, they

would not have thought of revolt from their earthly lords and masters. And the peasants are enraged, because I will not lead them on to overcome their masters and set them in high places instead——”

“Why!” exclaimed Gretchen, interrupting him in her eagerness, “dear Martin, don’t you see that was exactly why our *Lord Jesus Christ’s* followers were so grieved and disappointed in Him; they wanted Him to gain great temporal power—even those near to Him, His chosen disciples, wanted (or at least their friends did for them) to sit one on His right hand and the other on His left when He came into His kingdom.”

“Now, may God bless you! I feel comforted, and know that He Who enabled me to trample the enemy under foot when he rose up against me like a cruel dragon, or a raging lion, will not permit this enemy to crush me, now that he appears with the perfidious aspect of the serpent. If God be for me, what matter who is on the other side!”

“God is for you, Martin. Isn’t He, Luke?” Gretchen said, appealing to the blind man, who had been listening in silence.

“Yes, indeed, I believe so,” Luke replied. “But Dr. Martin Luther, you must take care, for many have sworn to have your life——” He was interrupted.

A man suddenly pushed open the house-door—Gretchen, in her joy at seeing Luther, had forgotten to bolt it. Throwing himself on the Reformer, the man clutched hold of his throat with an iron hand.

So sudden was the attack and so deadly the grasp on his throat, that Luther was unable to free himself or to call for assistance.

Unable to realise what was happening the blind man raised a shout.

“What’s this?” he cried. “What is it?” Then he shouted again as he realised there was an attack on his friend Luther.

Meanwhile, the latter and his would-be captor

struggled hard, the assailant holding on grimly to the Reformer's throat, endeavouring to strangle him. The ruffian paid no heed to the blind man, or the frail-looking woman who stood shrinking, with pale face, looking on.

But the next moment, only half conscious of what she did, but feeling impelled by some force within her, Gretchen sprang at the intruder. The villain felt himself seized from behind and forced backward with almost superhuman strength.

So surprised was the man that, without waiting to ascertain the number of his assailants, he released Luther and rushed out of the house.

It had all happened in less than five minutes, and now the Reformer sank panting into a chair, gasping for breath. Meanwhile, Gretchen bolted the door in all haste, with trembling hands, while Luke demanded explanations.

"Oh, my blindness!" he cried. "How did you get rid of the rascal? I was afraid to strike out, or I might have hit my friends. Who was it made the fellow decamp?"

"Gretchen," replied the Reformer, with a smile. "Her little hands fought the battle, and overcame the enemy."

"Gretchen?" Luke cried. "Impossible! Gretchen is not strong enough to fight! Impossible for her to have done it!" he repeated.

"Not at all. The villain who burst into the room was throttling me, but Gretchen overcame and vanquished him," said Martin Luther.

"The Lord helped me," Gretchen said, simply. "He made strength out of my woman's weakness. It is a sign, Martin," she added, turning to her old friend, "a sign that the Lord is on your side, and that you, and the Reformation you have brought about, will not be overcome of evil, but will overcome evil with good."

Presently Luther went away, cheered with the

saying, and after he had gone, Luke and his wife knelt down together, and thanked God that He had enabled her to win in the very unequal contest. And they prayed that Luther's life might be still more blessed.

Once again, later on, when Luther's life was threatened by poison, and Gretchen heard of the plot, she was able to tell him of it, and thus frustrate the designs of his enemies.

Luke was very proud of these achievements.

"My wife is as brave as she is sweet," he said to his father and Hannah.

But Gretchen gave God the praise.

Later, when Luther had laid aside his monkish dress, and repudiated the vows he felt that he ought never to have made, it was Gretchen who assisted him to marry Catherine von Bora, and she was in this affair, as always, their true friend.

She was too happy in her own marriage with her beloved Luke, to feel any jealousy of Luther's bride, even had her sweet nature allowed it; and Catherine, for her part, clung to the dear married woman as to a sister.

Later still, when Luther was recognised as one of the greatest of men, and stood before the world as Reformer of the Church, Gretchen was heard to say:—

"I am only a woman, nevertheless I am the friend of Martin Luther."

And like a true friend, Gretchen stood by Martin in happiness and in sorrow.

Luther might have gained quite a fortune by his writings, but he would not accept money for them, as he wished to give the work of his pen freely to his fellow-creatures.

Gretchen and Luke had no children; they were therefore able to help those of Martin and Catherine in every possible way, and they loved them as their own.

* * * * *

"And how died the Reformer?" asked Luke,

twenty-one years after Luther's marriage, when Gretchen returned home after assisting to nurse her old friend.

"As a Christian," she answered, sitting down to tell her dear husband all about it. "You know, Luke," said she, "Martin went to Eisleben to settle some dispute that had arisen between the two brothers, the Counts of Mansfeld. He left home in good spirits, but dear Catherine felt a presentiment of trouble and wept when she parted from him. I, as you know, happened to be at Eisleben on a visit to my parents, and when I heard Martin was ill, I went over to help to nurse him. He suffered great pain, but was very brave and patient.

"'Oh, how I suffer!' he said to his doctor. 'Dear Dr. Jonas, I think that here, where I was born and baptised, I shall die.' And so it was, for not long after that he breathed his last."

"Did he say anything at the end?" Luke asked.

"During his last moments he repeated in Latin, 'Into Thy hands I commit my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O God, the God of Truth!' And then again, 'Lord Jesus Christ, accept my soul! O Heavenly Father, though I must leave this body and be torn from life, yet I know for certain that I shall abide eternally with Thee, and that no one can take me out of Thy hands.'

"His last words were in answer to the doctor, who called out in a loud tone of voice, 'Reverend Father, do you remain fixed in faith in Christ, and in the doctrine you have preached?' He just answered, 'Yes, yes,' and then peacefully passed away."

"I like to know that," Luke said. "If a faith can sustain a man in life and in death, that's the faith for me."

"And for me," said Gretchen.

THE END.

